

# Closing gaps, opening doors

Promoting Inclusive Data Collection for Girls and Young  
Womens Leadership and Participation





# Acknowledgements

We thank everyone who has contributed to this research in any capacity, including the research reference group, She Leads Country Coordinators, and the girls and young women (GYW) advocacy and data experts Georgia Booth (independent consultant), Linda Weisert (Children's Investment Fund Foundation, CIFF) and Claudia Cappa (United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF). We particularly thank the girls and young women who participated in the research and contributed their thoughts, insights and lived experiences of leadership, participation and decision making.

The research was commissioned by the She Leads Consortium and its technical partner Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030), and was conducted by The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC).

## She Leads

**She Leads** is a joint programme of **Plan International Netherlands**, **Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT)**, the **African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)**, **Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL)** and the **Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)**, supported by **Equal Measures 2030** as a technical partner. It has been operating since 2021.

She Leads brings together child rights organizations, feminist/women's rights organizations and groups led by GYW, with the aim to increase the sustained influence of GYW on decision making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions. The programme focuses geographically on East Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya), West Africa (Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia) and the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan).

As a strategic priority for 2023, She Leads focuses on evidence generation and research. This research study is one of its key activities for 2023.

**EQUAL  
MEASURES  
2030**

**She  
LEADS**

## She Leads Research Study

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She Leads and Equal Measures 2030

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## Equal Measures 2030 (EM 2030)

**EM2030** is a coalition of national, regional and global leaders from feminist networks, civil society, international development and the private sector. It develops and disseminates demand-driven data, visualisations, analysis and tools (including the flagship SDG Gender Index) to monitor progress and hold governments accountable.

EM2030 works across its coalition, and in collaboration with feminist organizations and movements, to strengthen its capacity to use data in advocacy and to share expertise in data-driven advocacy.

## The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC)

**TSIC** is a women- and minority-led global social impact consultancy with offices in the United Kingdom (UK), Ghana, countries across the Caribbean, India and Hong Kong, serving markets in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East and, more recently, Latin America.

Since 2008, TSIC has worked with over 300 social impact organizations from more than 40 countries, including charities, foundations and social investors, on research and evaluation projects, on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and on driving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



## Acronyms and abbreviations

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>EM2030</b> | Equal Measures 2030                     |
| <b>FGD</b>    | Focus group discussion                  |
| <b>GBV</b>    | Gender-based violence                   |
| <b>GEWE</b>   | Gender equality and women's empowerment |
| <b>GYW</b>    | Girls and young women                   |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-governmental organization           |
| <b>NSO</b>    | National Statistic Office               |
| <b>SDGs</b>   | Sustainable Development Goals           |
| <b>SGS</b>    | Strengthening Gender Statistics         |
| <b>TSIC</b>   | The Social Investment Consultancy       |
| <b>UBOS</b>   | Uganda Bureau of Statistics             |
| <b>UN</b>     | United Nations                          |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children's Fund          |

# Executive summary

Enabling girls and young women (GYW) to adopt leadership roles in their communities and participate in decision making is key to supporting policies and actions that promote gender equality, that challenge discriminatory practices and that close gender-related disparities. However, data gaps exist that limit understanding of GYW participation and consequently the progress that can be made.

This research responds to observations by the She Leads consortium on the significant data gaps on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, in particular the lack of age- and gender-disaggregated data. Through analysis of primary and secondary evidence, the study identifies barriers in the current data landscape and opportunities to advance progress. The study was conducted across the nine She Leads countries in East and West Africa and the Middle East, but it is aimed at the wider GYW advocacy sector beyond these countries.

## Objectives

- To explore the current data available on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, including relevant frameworks guiding data collection.
- To identify the main data gaps on GYW leadership, participation and decision making and the impact they are having.
- To identify the key barriers to high-quality data collection and usage within the GYW advocacy sector.
- To identify potential leverage points across the GYW advocacy sector to strengthen data practices, including the role of GYW, and to explore the potential impacts of improved data collection and usage.
- To develop practical recommendations for stakeholders within the GYW advocacy sector, including international organizations, policymakers, local GYW organizations and GYW themselves.

The results of the study also contribute to the evidence that underpins the advocacy efforts of the She Leads consortium.

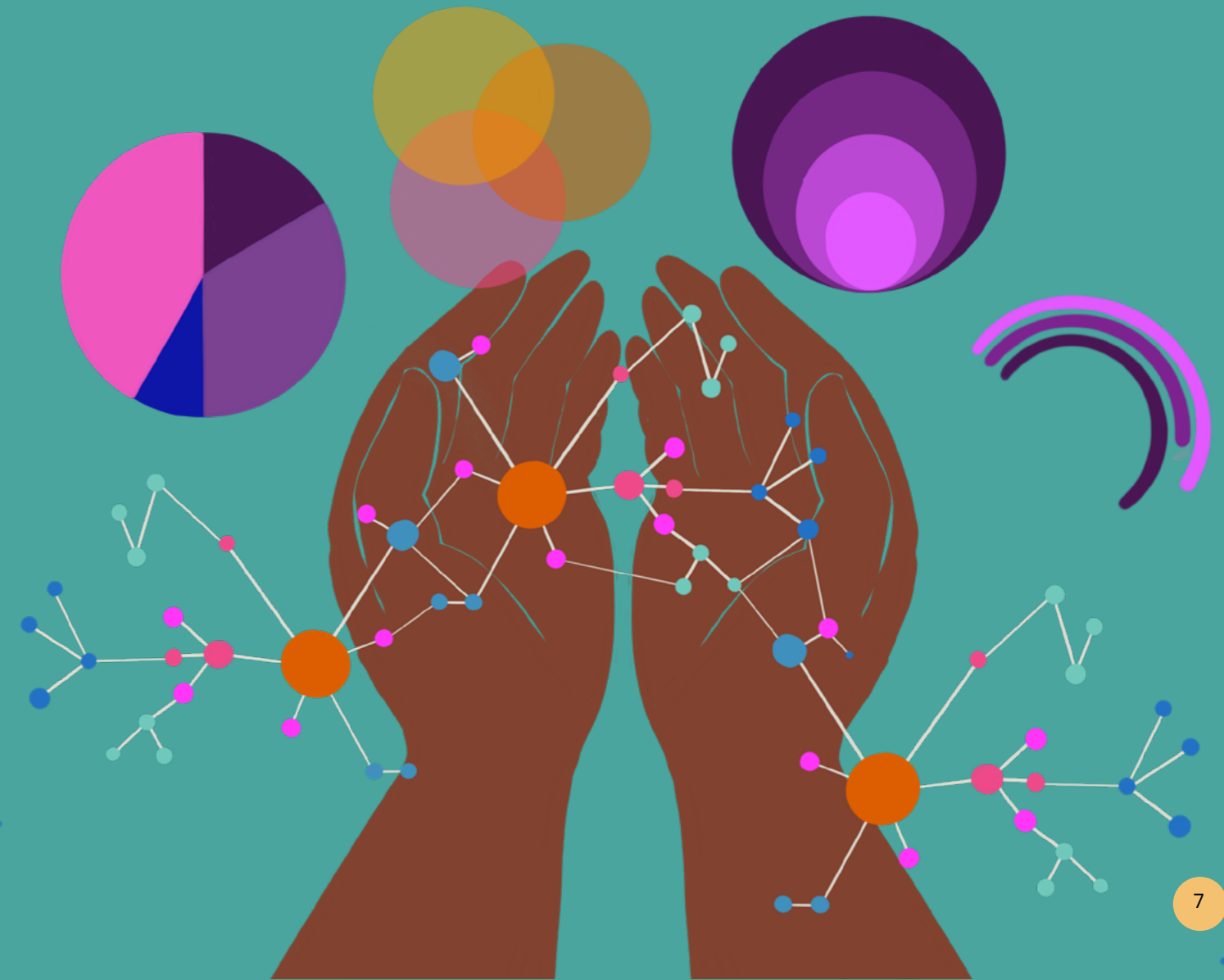
## Key Findings

- **Conceptual clarity on GYW leadership, participation and decision making is lacking.**

Current frameworks mainly focus on political aspects and miss features of leadership and decision making that are important to GYW. This limits the usefulness of these frameworks for GYW-focused organizations and advocates, hindering their ability to conduct research-informed data production for community initiatives, impact measurement and advocacy. The shortage of comprehensive frameworks is worsened by challenges in understanding key data concepts and varying levels of confidence in them.

- **The current state of data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making does not meet the needs of advocates.**

Consequently, stakeholders – including GYW themselves – often use ad hoc or incomplete data from a variety of sources, including social media, for different purposes.



- **Several data gaps exist in GYW leadership, participation and decision making pertaining to data collection methodology and how the data are analysed and used. This goes beyond a lack of gender- and age-disaggregated data to also include local-level or community-driven data.**

Other gaps relate to the lack of data on the lived experiences of GYW and limitations in sharing or accessing data, meaning that GYW and GYW-led organizations do not recognize their experiences in the data collected. This results in lower levels of interest and trust in research and data collection as a whole.

- **Three types of barriers exist in data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making:**

**1. Resource and infrastructure barriers** include physical infrastructure challenges in rural areas and accessibility barriers faced by GYW to freely participate in their communities due to social and physical constraints. There are challenges in producing and using data stemming from a lack of data knowledge and skills, as well as infrastructure barriers faced by National Statistic Offices (NSOs) and the financial and resource constraints of GYW-focused and -led organizations. In turn, these barriers interact with or create further obstacles that affect organizations working with GYW at local levels.

**2. Institutional and policy barriers** include insufficient public investments in parallel with a lack of political will around GYW leadership. They also include an exclusive focus adopted by NSOs on quantitative data, which limits how accurately GYW experiences can be captured. These barriers are mostly relevant to decision makers and policymakers, but their impact can be seen on GYW.

**3. Societal and cultural barriers** affect GYW directly and are difficult to address. They include social and cultural norms (i.e., GYW leadership being poorly understood or outright opposed in some contexts), the need to safeguard GYW (e.g., while travelling to participate in research) and a lack of trust in government by GYW.

- **If the data around GYW leadership, participation and decision making improved, GYW agency and trust in data will improve too. Progress can then be made in practice on GYW participation.**

Better data collection approaches can address existing power imbalances within the sector and amplify GYW's voices through greater use of qualitative methods. Research may then align better with GYW perceptions of what leadership, participation and decision making means to them. It can also contribute to building evidence-based advocacy and create opportunities to engage communities and decision makers.

- **The strengths of different stakeholders within the GYW advocacy sector can be built on and utilized to improve data collection:**

**1. GYW** themselves can play a more active role in the research process. They can participate in impact measurement by advocating for research in their communities, by supporting data collectors with outreach or by helping to contextualize and disseminate results. Their knowledge is grounded in a good understanding of local culture and contexts, which is valuable in capturing the nuanced insights on GYW.

**2. Many GYW-focused and -led organizations** already make use of data. They can also support GYW in setting agendas and methodologies for data production in their communities and for contextualizing the data collection tools and methods. Resources can be lacking, but with the right support, these organizations are well-positioned to conduct more research and data collection themselves.

**3. Foundations and large international/regional/national organizations** currently conduct many of the data collection activities around GYW leadership, participation and decision making. They are in a strong position to strengthen the data capacity and knowledge of local organizations and movements, and to collate findings across different countries and regions. They can encourage sharing and learning at a higher level, potentially involving decision makers and policymakers too.

**4. Decision makers and policymakers** can advocate for evidence-based policymaking at local or national levels. They can lobby for the allocation of more funding to improve data systems, to support NSOs to collect gender- and age-disaggregated data, and to build connections and trust between themselves, GYW and organizations that advocate for GYW interests.



## Conclusions and recommendations

Recognizing the breadth of the GYW advocacy sector, and based on the evidence collected, we believe the following actions can contribute to an improved data ecosystem and to progress on GYW leadership:

**Data producers and those overseeing the design of studies should critically review the concepts of GYW leadership, participation and decision making so they align better with the perceptions of GYW themselves.**

Future research into and data collection on GYW leadership, participation and decision making should take into account non-political and community-focused leadership and participation (e.g., advocating for the interests of other GYW or volunteering), as well as decision-making at a personal level (e.g., a young woman making informed and autonomous decisions around her professional development).

**Data producers should aim to embed more participatory research and data collection methods.**

Including GYW and grassroots organizations in all research stages can bring nuance and context which can be missed when studies are conducted by those who are not based in communities. Moreover, shifting to more participatory, creative or qualitative methods may capture the true voices of GYW and their experiences of leadership. An active GYW role in the process will improve their trust in the research, while ensuring the data collected are of a higher quality and more contextually sensitive. However, such an approach requires careful thought to address ethical and safeguarding concerns that might emerge from engaging with GYW. These actions must include removing barriers to GYW participation in data collection and understanding the different contexts and needs of GYW in all their diversity.

**Data producers (foundations, large international and national organizations, research institutions, but also GYW-focused and -led organizations) should aim to embed an intersectional approach to data wherever possible.**

Factors such as the location of GYW (rural versus urban), religion, education and disability and other identities should be explored to better understand GYW experiences of leadership, participation and decision making. These approaches should be embedded both by those who collect GYW data for a particular research study or who measure programme impact, and also as part of regular/standard data collection practices at local and national levels.

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**Foundations, large international/regional/national organizations, decision makers and policymakers should aim to strengthen the data capacity, knowledge and skills of GYW-focused and -led organizations.**

These groups have community connections, local expertise and some data capabilities. Strengthening their skills can empower local GYW organizations to conduct research for advocacy and programming, and enable them to support other data collectors in the area. Increasing awareness about GYW leadership, participation and decision making is a long-term endeavour that requires sustained funding for GYW and others in data production and use. Advocacy for increased funding from governments, international organizations and donors, as well as sustainable revenue models like community-led initiatives, are crucial.

**More shared learning spaces should be established around GYW leadership, participation and decision making.**

Considering the broad and interconnected nature of the topic, there is a great need for shared learning among all stakeholders. This creates an opportunity to better understand GYW leadership, participation and decision making, as well as to build a stronger evidence base to draw on for GYW advocacy at different levels. In practice, this could mean connecting to other thematic constituencies that also have better access to funding and more established data collection actors/systems.

**Finally, evidence-based policymaking on GYW leadership, participation and decision making should be prioritized.**

By facilitating grassroots organizations' access to data funding, commissioning gender and GYW studies at the national level, and supporting advocacy for dedicated data collection units, decision makers and policymakers can foster a collaborative ecosystem that harnesses shared data insights to drive transformative change. This, in turn, would enable governments to achieve their commitments towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international treaties to safeguard human rights, and to end gender discrimination.

## Definitions

As part of the research, it was uncovered that one of the key barriers to using data for GYW advocacy is the different levels of confidence and understanding of data concepts.

To ensure that all readers of the report have a better grasp of the content, the definitions of key terms used in this report are included below.<sup>1</sup>

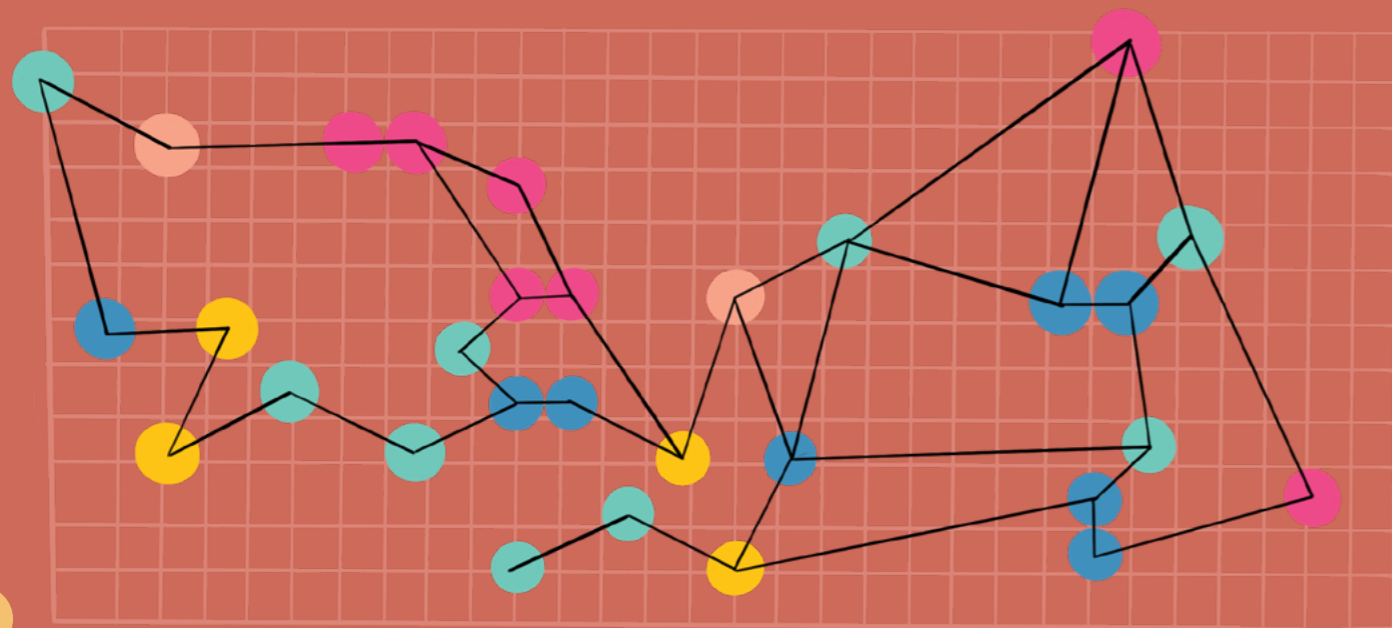
- **Data** refers to facts, information, narratives or statistics that are typically represented in a structured and organized form. Data can take various formats, such as numbers, text, images, anecdotes, audio or video, and are used to provide insights, to support decision making and to draw conclusions about a particular subject or phenomenon.
- **Decision makers/policymakers** have the power to influence or determine policies and practices at an international, national, regional or local level.
- **Data gaps** refer to the lack of quantitative statistics or the lack of systematically collected data that are representative and generalizable to the population in question.<sup>2</sup>
- **Data producers** are the groups and organizations that are involved in producing and generating data. This includes collecting, analysing and processing data for meaningful insights.
- **Gender data** include data that: a) are collected and presented by sex or gender as a primary and overall classification; b) reflect gender issues; c) are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of gender and capture all aspects of a person's life; and d) are developed through collection methods that take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data.<sup>3</sup>
- **Girls and young women's (GYW) advocacy organizations** focus on the needs, rights and concerns of GYW. They typically advocate for their empowerment, education, health, safety and equal opportunities in various aspects of society, including education, healthcare, employment and social justice.

<sup>1</sup>However, part of the research findings also indicate that current definitions on GYW leadership, participation and decision making are somewhat limited, and that these should be revised to more accurately reflect GYW experiences.

<sup>2</sup>Women Deliver. Advocating for a Stronger Evidence Base for Gender Equality: An Analysis of Gender Data and Knowledge Gaps. Working Paper (New York: Women Deliver, 2020) <https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Data-Gaps-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Integrating a Gender Perspective into Statistics. Studies in Methods, Series F No. 111 (New York: UN DESA, 2016) <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/Standards-and-Methods/files/Handbooks/gender/Integrating-a-Gender-Perspective-into-Statistics-E.pdf>.

- **Intersectionality** refers to the layers of disadvantages caused by the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group.
- **GYW leadership** is understood as GYW being in a position (formal and informal) to lead their communities, influence policies and other decisions, and advocate for others. It also means 'involving others and recognising their role to solve challenges'
- **GYW participation** means that GYW 'are able to work in all stages of decision-making, that their opinions are respected and taken seriously, and they can participate on equal terms with adults at all levels, or alternatively work independently from adults and make decisions solely with the involvement of youth voices'
- **GYW decision-making** refers to GYW's ability to make informed and autonomous decisions about their own lives as well as their community and environment.
- **Qualitative data:** Qualitative data is non-numerical information that is collected to understand, interpret, and analyze phenomena, experiences, behaviours, and attitudes. It often involves detailed descriptions, observations, opinions, narratives, and insights that provide depth and context to a research topic. Qualitative data is usually obtained through methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, content analysis, and open-ended survey questions. The analysis of qualitative data involves identifying patterns, themes, and relationships to derive meaning and understanding of the subject being studied.
- **Quantitative Data:** Quantitative data refers to numerical information and data that can be measured, quantified, and analysed using statistical methods. It involves collecting data in a structured and standardized manner, typically through surveys, questionnaires, experiments, or numerical measurements. Quantitative data allows for objective analysis and comparison, making it suitable for statistical analysis, hypothesis testing, and drawing generalizable conclusions. Common statistical techniques used with quantitative data include mean, median, mode, standard deviation, correlation, regression analysis, and more.



## Introduction

Gender disparities persist in various sectors. Studying the opportunities, challenges and barriers related to the leadership, participation and decision making of girls and young women (GYW) is crucial in addressing these gaps.

Enabling GYW to adopt leadership roles in their communities and participate in decision making on issues that affect their lives is key to supporting policies and actions that promote gender equality, that challenge discriminatory practices and that close gender-related disparities. However, there is growing evidence that poor-quality gender data negatively affect GYW. Poor data means a lack of awareness around the barriers and challenges faced by GYW, which means they are underrepresented in decision-making processes, policies and programmes.

A report published by Data2X in 2021<sup>5</sup> found that the funding for gender data has stagnated since 2009 despite growing demand. It goes on to indicate that an additional \$500 million per year is needed in donor funding to build and maintain key gender databases. The lack of high-quality, reliable data and evidence-based policies means that the situation of women and girls is often misunderstood and overlooked by decision makers and political leaders globally.

There have been some **attempts to categorize the existing data on gender and gender equality around the world**. For example, Focus 2030 has identified key data sources across six areas: gender-based violence (GBV), economic justice and rights, bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights; feminist action for climate justice; technology and innovation for gender equality; feminist movements and leadership; education; and funding for gender equality.<sup>6</sup> The Gender Data Portal coordinated by the World Bank<sup>7</sup> provides gender data across 14 topics, including assets, education, employment and time use, leadership, norms and decision making, violence and others. Likewise, Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) has developed an SDG Gender Index that utilizes data to track and measure progress towards achieving gender equality at a global level.<sup>8</sup> This Index evaluates how well countries are progressing in achieving gender-related targets and goals within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The data within it help identify gaps, advocate for policy changes and drive actions to accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

<sup>5</sup>Open Data Watch (ODW), State of Gender Data Financing 2021 (Washington, DC: Data2X, 2021) [https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/State-of-Gender-Data-Financing-2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/State-of-Gender-Data-Financing-2021_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>6</sup>Overview of Data Resources on Gender Equality Across the World", Focus 2030, Facts and Figures, 3 March 2023, <https://focus2030.org/Overview-of-data-resources-on-gender-equality-across-the-world>.

<sup>7</sup>"Gender Data Portal", World Bank, n.d., <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>8</sup>EM2030, *Data Driving Change: Introducing the EM2030 SDG Gender Index* (Woking, Surrey: EM2030, 2018) <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EM-Data-report-v8-1.pdf>.



There are **no universally agreed definitions of the concepts of women's leadership, participation and decision making**. Yet leadership and meaningful participation exist across different spheres of life: who manages the household budget and how; who makes decisions around education; who fulfils the unofficial leadership roles within different communities. While there is a lack of common agreement on definitions, it is clear that the themes of leadership, participation and decision making have a direct impact on how communities and societies move forward.

However, most of the gender data that are available currently focus on **a narrow meaning of leadership and participation – mainly political aspects**. Thus, data are available on the number of women in executive and government positions globally,<sup>9</sup> including national parliaments and local governments.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, Data2X conducted a review of the most pressing gender data gaps in **public participation**.<sup>11</sup> While these gaps focused too on the political aspects of participation, the report called for more data on: (1) women's representation in local government and political organizations; (2) private sector, professional and non-governmental organization (NGO) representation and leadership; (3) national identity documentation; (4) voter registration and turnout; and (5) violence against women in politics. Another report on data gaps authored by Women Deliver<sup>12</sup> identifies data and knowledge gaps around women's leadership during public health crises and conflict resolutions, non-violent related barriers that affect women's political participation, and the role of women politicians and leaders in pushing forward gender equality legislation and policies.

All of these issues are even more prominent – and, in turn, have bigger consequences – when it comes to data available on GYW. Existing gender data are very rarely disaggregated by age<sup>13</sup> (or indeed by characteristics such as disability or education), which makes it practically impossible to understand and compare the situation of GYW across countries. Where some GYW data exist, they often relate to health (e.g., sexual and reproductive), education or experiences of GBV.<sup>14</sup> **Scant data exist on GYW leadership, participation or decision making across community, local, national or international levels**, making this a particularly significant data gap that needs to be better understood and addressed by different stakeholders.

**This research explores the data gaps around GYW leadership, participation and decision making through an analysis of primary and secondary evidence. The aim is to better understand the current data landscape, looking across stakeholders at different levels, and to identify key data gaps, barriers and opportunities to advance progress.**

<sup>9</sup>Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in Politics: 2023" (Geneva: IPU, 2023) <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023>.

<sup>10</sup>"Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation", UN Women, last updated 18 September 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

<sup>11</sup>Data2X, "Mapping Gender Data Gaps in Public Participation" (Washington, DC: Data2X, 2020) [https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MappingGenderDataGaps\\_Public.pdf](https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MappingGenderDataGaps_Public.pdf).

<sup>12</sup>Women Deliver, "Advocating for a Stronger Evidence Base for Gender Equality: An Analysis of Gender Data and Knowledge Gaps" (2020) <https://womendeliver.org/publications/advocating-for-a-stronger-evidence-base-for-gender-equality-an-analysis-of-gender-data-and-knowledge-gaps/>

<sup>13</sup>"Making Adolescent Girls Visible Through Gender Data Gaps", Data2X, 11 October 2022, <https://data2x.org/making-adolescent-girls-visible-through-gender-data/>.

<sup>14</sup>"Gender Equality", UNICEF Adolescent Data Portal, April 2022, <https://data.unicef.org/adp/snapshots/gender-equality/>.

# Research approach

## Purpose

This research study was commissioned by EM2030 and She Leads to explore and consolidate knowledge on gender equality across the She Leads regions within the context of data gaps. The aim is to assess the nature and effects of data gaps on GYW leadership, participation and decision making and to consider how different stakeholders, including GYW themselves, can provide lasting solutions to enhance available data and understanding of the issues.

The study asks: **How can improved measurement and data collection enhance the leadership and participation of GYW?** A number of related research questions were also identified at the start of the research, which are addressed throughout the report:

1. What is the state of data on participation, leadership and decision making of GYWs at household, community, school, civil society and institutional levels in the nine She Leads countries?
  - a. How can we classify the data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making?
  - b. What legal frameworks exist around data collection in the nine She Leads countries and what is their role?
2. What conceptual and measurement frameworks exist to understand the participation, leadership and decision making of GYW? What do GYW feel is still needed/missing to measure the extent of GYW leadership and participation?
3. What are the key barriers and enablers for collecting data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making?
4. How do GYW and organizations currently use data to advance youth leadership and political participation? How are existing data gaps affecting their ability to do this?
5. How can GYW themselves contribute to a better understanding of data needs and leadership measurement indicators?
6. What outcomes could be achieved with improved access to high-quality data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making?

See [Annex 1](#) for the research matrix that maps these questions onto the methods and target audiences.

# Principles

Key principles were identified at the start of the research process to guide the study and ensure it aligns with the values of She Leads and the theme of strengthening GYW leadership and participation. The meaning and practical application of these research principles are described here.

### Attention and reflection on different ways of knowing and situated knowledge.

GYW advocates and partners possess valuable community knowledge, which must be recognized. She Leads Country Coordinators and the global team were involved in research inception, data tool development and reporting, ensuring adaptation to various cultural contexts.

### Mixed methods and intersectionality.

Quantitative and narrative-based approaches are necessary to capture different ways of knowing – the research design combined quantitative and qualitative data supported by desk-based research. The study also included diverse GYW groups, recognizing their multifaceted identities influenced by race, social class, employment, education, ethnicity, physical attributes and location.

### Participation and co-design.

The study prioritized participation and co-design by maintaining feedback loops and regular updates for stakeholders throughout the research process, with support from EM2030, the She Leads network and Country Coordinators. EM2030's involvement in the Global Advocacy Network of She Leads allowed for updates and shared insights. Additionally, a research validation workshop was held with stakeholders – including GYW – at the end of the study to finalize the report. To ensure a firsthand GYW perspective, two GYW interns were recruited for the research.

### Ethics and safeguarding in research.

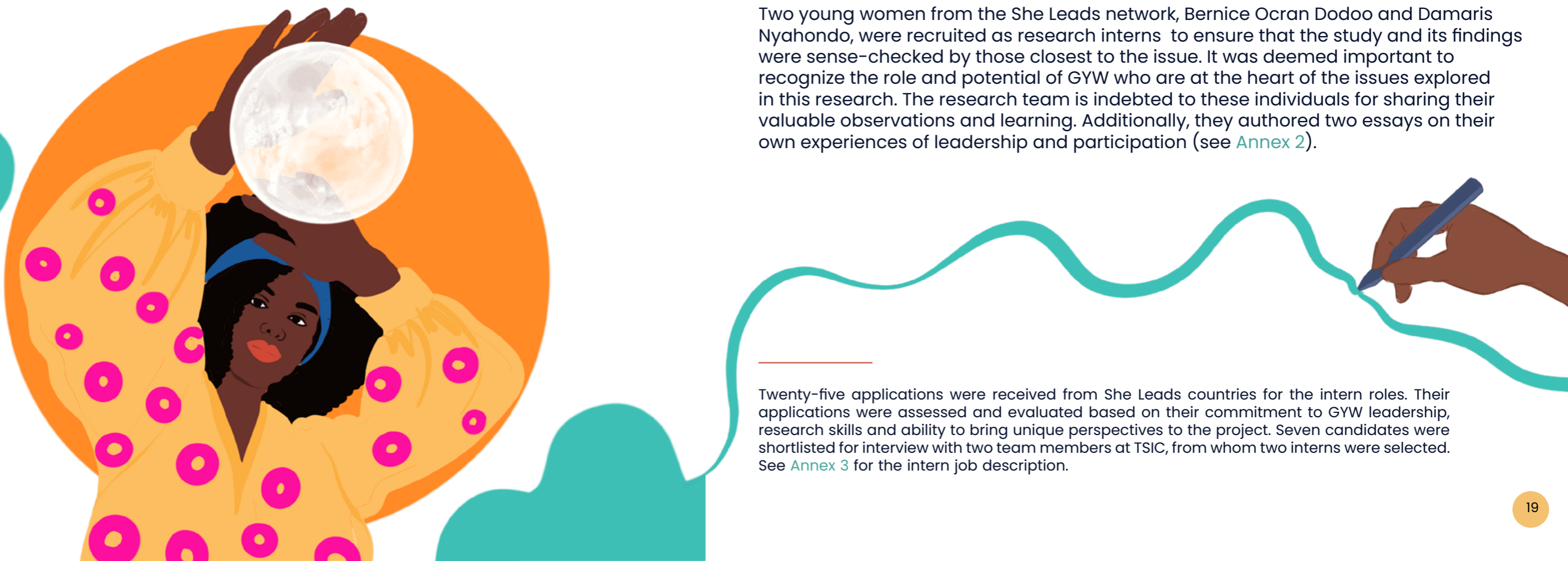
Prioritizing the best interests of GYW and preventing harm in research, we adhered to She Leads safeguarding principles. Ethical clearance for field research was obtained from relevant institutions in Jordan, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

# Governance

The research was led mainly by the TSIC team, supported by the EM2030 team, while consulting with the research reference group at She Leads and the two interns. At TSIC, the research was led by Bonnie Chiu (London, UK) and Sarah-Jane Danchie (Accra, Ghana), supported by Senior Researchers Sana Iqbal (based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, and Munich, Germany) and Amani Al-Qadi (based in Jordan and the UK) and managed by Gabriele NemanYTE (Edinburgh, UK). At EM2030, the research was supported by Sinéad Nolan, Coretta Jonah and Albert Motivans. The countries of the She Leads Network (especially Jordan, Uganda and Sierra Leone) also supported in field data collection.

Two young women from the She Leads network, Bernice Ocran Doodoo and Damaris Nyahondo, were recruited as research interns to ensure that the study and its findings were sense-checked by those closest to the issue. It was deemed important to recognize the role and potential of GYW who are at the heart of the issues explored in this research. The research team is indebted to these individuals for sharing their valuable observations and learning. Additionally, they authored two essays on their own experiences of leadership and participation (see [Annex 2](#)).

Twenty-five applications were received from She Leads countries for the intern roles. Their applications were assessed and evaluated based on their commitment to GYW leadership, research skills and ability to bring unique perspectives to the project. Seven candidates were shortlisted for interview with two team members at TSIC, from whom two interns were selected. See [Annex 3](#) for the intern job description.



**"One of the key learnings I gained from this internship was the transformative power of data and evidence-based research in driving positive change. This learning underscores the need for a shift away from circumstantial decision-making towards a more systematic and evidence-based approach." – Correspondence with research intern**

One of the interns shared her experience of the study:

As part of the data collection and analysis stage, several translators also assisted in developing and correcting translations of the research tools used and the outputs. Their contribution is also valued highly.

## Methodology

An evidence review was conducted to map and understand existing sources and literature on GYW leadership, participation and decision making. Evidence was gathered and analysed using both the literature available on framing or conceptualizing data gaps in leadership and decision making as well as practical case studies of working with GYW in different programmes, including internal She Leads documentation.

This review was followed by a mixed-method primary study, making use of quantitative and qualitative research methods in addition to desk-based research. Mixed-methods research is particularly effective in achieving data triangulation, while the data collected ensures that the voices of multiple stakeholders are included, thus allowing multiple entry points to validate findings.

The primary data collection tools were co-designed by the EM2030 team, She Leads colleagues (including Country Coordinators so the tools are culturally and contextually appropriate) and the research interns to reflect GYW voices. This approach enhanced the legitimacy of the research in the eyes of the stakeholders, and it also increased the quality of research methods and the results yielded by ensuring suitability to local contexts and to participants' needs.

The research took a hybrid format: some activities were held in-person (in Jordan, Sierra Leone and Uganda) and others online. Jordan, Sierra Leone and Uganda were selected for field work and focus groups to represent each of the three She Leads regions (East Africa, West Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)). It also meant that the study could engage the She Leads network at different stages of its work and reach a diverse population of GYW.

| Audience                                     | Data collection method                            | Notes  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Girls and young women</b>                 | Online survey shared across the She Leads network | 399 responses collected from a survey made available in Arabic (in Jordan and Lebanon), Amharic (in Ethiopia), French (in Mali) and English. Decisions on the survey languages were made based on recommendations of the She Leads Country Coordinators. |
|  | In-person focus group discussions (FGDs)          | 6 FGDs with 61 GYW (across Jordan, Sierra Leone and Uganda)  |
| <b>GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations</b> | In-person and online interviews                   | With 2 organizations in Jordan, 5 in Sierra Leone and 6 in Uganda  |
| <b>She Leads network</b>                     | Online and in-person interviews                   | 9 interviews with Country Coordinators and 2 interviews with global She Leads staff  |
| <b>Data and policy stakeholders</b>          | In-person and online interviews                   | 2 interviewees in Jordan, 3 in Uganda and 3 in Sierra Leone, mainly with government representatives (e.g., Ministry of Gender and national youth governmental organizations) but also representatives from private and non-profit sectors                |
| <b>She Leads network</b>                     | Online and in-person interviews                   | 3 interviewees (from the Children's International Fund Foundation (CIFF) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and an independent consultant)  |

Table 1. Primary data collection methods and research audiences.

Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVIVO. A thematic analysis was conducted to draw meaningful conclusions from the responses to the open-ended survey questions.

## Survey participants

The online survey was completed by 399 GYW. However, due to different approaches in survey dissemination, 224 of those responses came from Lebanon (see response rates in Table 2). For comparability and to ensure the Lebanese responses did not outweigh all others, a stratified sampling method was applied to extract 25 responses from Lebanon for use in the analysis phase (Jordan was used as a comparative sample so the samples matched in age, education and disability). This resulted in a final survey sample of 199 GYW.

| Country      | Total survey responses            |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ethiopia     | 15                                |
| Ghana        | 12                                |
| Jordan       | 27                                |
| Kenya        | 35                                |
| Lebanon      | 224 (25 used in analysis)         |
| Liberia      | 8                                 |
| Mali         | 21                                |
| Sierra Leone | 34                                |
| Uganda       | 23                                |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>399 (199 used in analysis)</b> |

Table 2. Survey responses by country



| Characteristic                 | Finding  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Age (N=197)                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.6% of respondents aged 16–17 years</li> <li>• 47.7% of respondents aged 18–22 years</li> <li>• 35.5% of respondents aged 23–27 years</li> <li>• 12.2% of respondents aged 28–35 years</li> <li>• Mean age of respondents: 23 years</li> </ul>             |
| Education (N=198)              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65.7% of respondents had completed tertiary education (e.g., university-level education)</li> <li>• 31.8% had completed secondary education (e.g., high school)</li> <li>• 2.5% had completed primary education</li> </ul>                                  |
| Area (N=195)                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67.2% of respondents were urban-based</li> <li>• 31.8% of respondents were rural-based</li> </ul>   |
| Disability (N=196)             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.6% of respondents claimed to have a disability</li> </ul>   |
| Religion (N=170) <sup>17</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 54.7% of respondents identified as Christian</li> <li>• 43.5% of respondents identified as Muslim</li> <li>• Christianity is the most prevalent religion in most She Leads countries, except in Jordan and Mali where Islam is the main religion</li> </ul> |

Table 3. Characteristics of the GYW survey sample

Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of those GYW included in the survey sample. Based on this, it is important to note that the survey results are more likely to reflect the voices of GYW aged 18–27 years, who have university-level education and are based in urban locations. Limited conclusions can be drawn from the survey about the experiences and opinions of GYW aged under 18 years or those with only primary-level education.

<sup>17</sup> The question on religion was not included in the Lebanon survey, on the recommendation of the country team.

It is also important to note that, due to the outreach approach of the survey, most (89 per cent) of respondents were engaged in She Leads activities to some extent, which may mean they are more likely to have considered the themes of leadership, participation and decision making prior to the survey. Only 9 per cent of respondents said they were not involved in any community or group activities.

## Focus group discussion participants

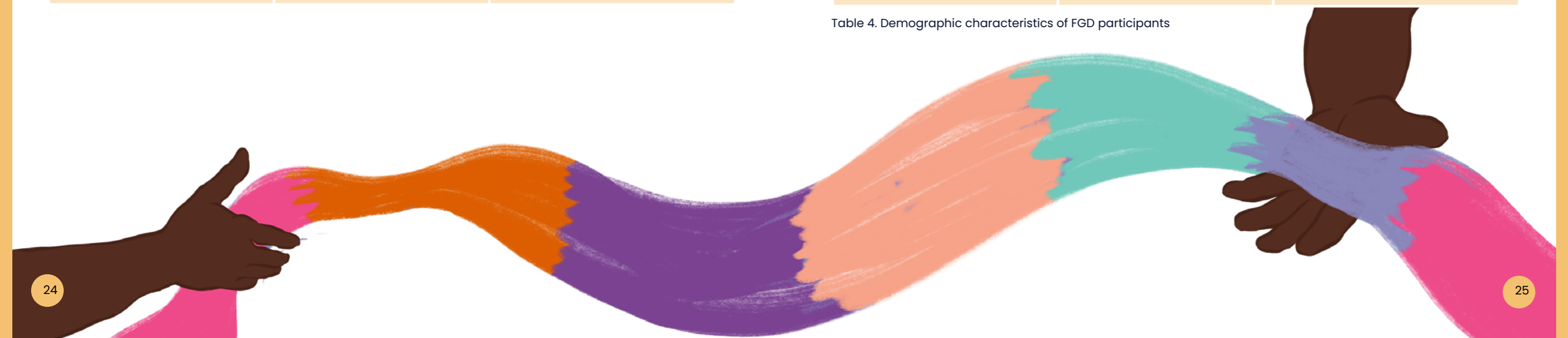
In-person FGDs were held in Jordan, Sierra Leone and Uganda. These were organized in collaboration with the respective She Leads country offices, which provided links with local GYW organizations.

Summative demographic characteristics are provided in Table 4 to illustrate the distribution of age, religion and employment status among participants.

| Country                            | Number of participants (n=61) | Participant profile   |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Jordan (Irbid and Al-Karak)</b> | 20                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mean age 27.8 years (across both FGDs)</li> <li>• 100% female</li> <li>• 100% Muslim</li> <li>• In Irbid, 60% were employed and 30% were homemakers (10% did not disclose their situation)</li> <li>• In Al-Karak, 40% were employed, 30% were trainees and 30% were volunteers</li> </ul> |

| Country                                    | Number of participants (n=61) | Participant profile  |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Uganda (Iganga and Kampala)</b>         | 21                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% female</li> <li>• In Iganga, the mean age was 23 years; 60% were Christians, 40% were Muslims</li> <li>• In Kampala, the mean age was 21 years; 60% were Christians, 40% were Muslims</li> </ul>     |
| <b>Sierra Leone (Moyemba and Freetown)</b> | 20                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% female</li> <li>• In Moyemba, the mean age was 21.6 years; 60% were Christians, 40% were Muslims</li> <li>• In Freetown, the mean age was 22 years; 60% were Christians, 40% were Muslims</li> </ul> |

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of FGD participants



## Limitations

GYW participants were recruited through the She Leads network, which potentially biases the sample towards those already active in their communities. In addition, an online survey requires internet access, thus excluding those without it. Despite the availability of local language options, most participants completed the surveys in English, which may have affected respondents' understanding of the questions and their responses.

While local and national policy stakeholders play a crucial role in understanding barriers and driving change, only a few were interviewed during the field research. In some countries, She Leads country teams could not provide contacts for interviews or else policymakers were unavailable, potentially leading to a lack of insights into the specific needs and priorities of policymakers and decision makers.

Due to limited prior research and exposure of GYW to the topic, an exploratory approach was taken in developing data collection tools and conducting interviews and FGDs. Consequently, some findings and recommendations apply broadly to GYW data, data capacity in GYW-led organizations and GYW's overall relationship with data, rather than solely focusing on data on leadership, participation and decision making. This approach allows the findings and recommendations to be applied more broadly within the sector beyond those focused explicitly on GYW leadership.



# Research findings

## 1. Current data landscape

At the inception stages of the She Leads programme in 2021, significant data gaps around GYW leadership, participation and decision making were observed. Being low- and middle-income countries across Africa and the Middle East, scant data were available for all the She Leads countries on GYW leadership, participation and decision making through global datasets; where data were available, they were not disaggregated by age (only data on women of all ages were available, rather than GYW-specific data). Additionally, it was observed that the existing data lacked an intersectional lens, while the ways that GYW measure and understand participation and leadership were not well recognized.<sup>18</sup>

Here, we summarize the existing data landscape on GYW leadership, participation and decision making: the data sources, existing theoretical and legal frameworks, and the main challenges observed.

### Data sources

Table 5 outlines the main sources of data around GYW leadership, participation and decision making. While some sources are limited in some way (e.g., they do not collect age-disaggregated data or do not explore themes of leadership), they have been included to show the key players within the GYW data ecosystem. The examples are not exhaustive, but only suggestive of the types of data sources discussed in this section.

| Types of sources                           | Examples   | Description   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>International NGOs and institutions</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OECD Gender Data Initiative</li> <li>• World Bank Gender Data Portal</li> <li>• UN Women, UN Gender Statistics Manual and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> <li>• Plan International</li> <li>• Population Council</li> <li>• Data2X</li> <li>• EM2030</li> <li>• She Leads</li> <li>• Girls Not Brides</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to collect large samples of gender-disaggregated data for comparison across countries and for advocacy use</li> <li>• Focus on disaggregation of data by both gender and age</li> </ul> |

| Types of sources                          | Examples   | Description  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Local NGOs</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ujamaa-Africa</li> <li>The Ark Foundation, Ghana</li> <li>Jordanian Women's Union</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to access communities more easily and collect data that more accurately reflect the contexts and realities of GYW</li> <li>My experience a lack of capacity and expertise in collecting, analysing and disseminating data</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Academic and research institutions</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL; Rutgers University)</li> <li>Global Institute for Women's Leadership (King's College London, UK)</li> <li>Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa</li> <li>Centre for Policy Research (CPR), India</li> <li>Institute of Gender Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expertise and capacity to collect and disseminate GYW data</li> <li>Can demonstrate academic rigour and credibility</li> <li>May lack relationships with communities or local and national decision makers</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Governmental institutions</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central Administration of Statistics, Lebanon</li> <li>National Institute of Statistics, Mali</li> <li>Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia</li> <li>Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandated to produce official, national-level GYW data which can directly influence policymaking</li> <li>Often, the data produced are not disaggregated by both age and gender</li> <li>Can be affected by other political priorities and lack of funding or political interest</li> <li>May have limited understanding of youth leadership.</li> </ul> |

Table 5. Sources of data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making

The sources of data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making vary according to the intended purpose. As reported by a She Leads Country Coordinator, it is often necessary to join hands with local and international organizations depending on the nature of the data needed.

"We either collect it from the GYW themselves or we get it from the national Youth Commission, and the police when it comes to victims of sexual violence. For the institutions that are responsible for those target groups, we also get data. The existence of data is a big problem. We have struggled to get data on GYW, specifically on leadership, participation and decision-making processes. We have more data on women in politics, household decision-making processes, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights data rather than GYW-specific [data] on leadership and participation. But yes, you can be able to get some data from them and also primarily from the target people that you work with. And also, from surveys and studies and research that have been conducted. Normally UNICEF does the multiple indicator cluster survey, we also collect data from that kind of survey." – She Leads Country network member, Sierra Leone

Another important feature of the available data sources is how up-to-date and relevant they are to the realities of GYW.

"There is a central statistics agency that is directly related to the different data sources, but it has not been properly functioning due to the different country situations [over the years]. So we depend on census more than 20 years [old]." – She Leads Country network member, Ethiopia

Table 5 describes those who collect and disseminate data, but those advocating for GYW interests often lack access to high-quality secondary data sources and have to rely on information gathered directly from GYW. Our stakeholder interviews showed that GYW often possess accurate insights and knowledge about their peers and communities, which can inform programming.

"We are using the information that we are getting from these girls in order to decide the topics we'll be working on. We don't decide that we'll be working on this topic – we bring the girls in, and we let them get information from their communities [and] take their own opinion. That's how we've decided to work on child marriage this year. While it was not one of the topics that we have already decided to be working on, but we saw that data." – She Leads Country network member, Sierra Leone

Moreover, the data are also evolving into new forms. As described, the survey showed that social media was the most popular means for accessing data, compared to news, education-related sources (e.g., school or university) or the community. One research participant described a changing perception of information.

**"The new generation's idea of information is more visual, more social." –FGD participant, Jordan**

The survey also showed that 67 per cent of those who are aware of such data access it through social media – a more important tool than any other. However, usually, these platforms simply allow access to other sources of data and therefore cannot be considered the primary source of data.

## Relevant frameworks

Several frameworks were reviewed and analysed in an effort to understand gender data gaps and their impact. The frameworks were helpful in broadening our discussion of different aspects of GYW leadership, decision making and participation when drafting the questions and designing the data collection tools for this research. The frameworks include those proposed by the Gates Foundation and Data2X, which emphasize intersectionality and data disaggregation by gender. However, during the primary research, few data/policy stakeholders mentioned youth/GYW-centric theoretical frameworks. Therefore, most of the frameworks discussed in this section were identified from secondary sources.

The SDG framework drives the work of most of the key data and policy stakeholders consulted in this study. Many regarded it as a useful exercise to track gender-based data in alignment with the SDGs to provide a clear picture of GYW decision making and participation and thus advocate for policy changes and targeted interventions. However, these stakeholders considered other frameworks to be relevant too for conceptualizing GYW participation. Full descriptions of these frameworks can be found in Annex 4. In the summaries that follow, the frameworks are categorized into: a) Development; b) Participation; and c) Gender.

## Development

### SDG framework

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>19</sup> sets out the SDGs adopted by UN member states in 2015, with specific and measurable indicators to evaluate progress. SDG 5 explicitly focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

<sup>19</sup>UN, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (New York: UN, 2015) <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf?ref=truth11.com>.

The SDG framework emphasizes the importance of partnerships and collaboration among governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. Collaboration facilitates data sharing, expertise and resources to improve gender data collection and analysis. Thus, this framework assists countries in gathering gender data for national action plans.

**"We work towards strengthening the capacities of data departments in countries to support them through capacity building. Normally we support government partners in data collection. Our starting point is how children are faring in the world and what needs to be measured. We use these indicators (SDG indicators). We are also responsible for analysis and reporting of data, it's critical to assess data gaps. That's why the SDGs are useful, they are universal and crosscutting." – GYW advocacy expert**

The 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the need for gender-disaggregated data. A comprehensive gender-focused data approach is essential to better understand gender-specific experiences, challenges and opportunities and to assess the well-being and status of GYW in various contexts. Several SDGs besides Goal 5 include gender-specific indicators. These concentrate on women aged 15–49 and offer opportunities to integrate an intersectional perspective, considering age, location, and marital status when addressing issues like unpaid labour, reproductive health and violence. Additionally, topics related to education, health and nutrition are relevant to young people, and greater awareness and access to data on these indicators could empower GYW in data-driven advocacy efforts.

However, careful analysis of these indicators reveals that none relate specifically to GYW leadership or youth leadership. Although some are cross-cutting (e.g., child marriage, education, GBV) and have relevance for examining the barriers GYW may face to their leadership, participation and decision making, they do not enable GYW leadership to be measured. Even the indicators for SDG 5 do not speak directly about youth participation, referring only to *"ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"*.<sup>20</sup> The indicators for this target are only twofold: (1) the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments, and (2) the proportion of women in managerial positions.<sup>21</sup> This too, possibly, reflects the challenges around agreeing on the definitions of leadership, participation and decision making, and the lack of data beyond political participation. It also means that, despite being useful for GYW to advocate on the issues in their community, these indicators do not relate directly to GYW leadership and participation since there is a lack of focus on youth in the SDG framework.

<sup>20</sup>UN, Transforming Our World, Target 5.5, 22.

<sup>21</sup>"SDG Indicators: Metadata Repository" (New York: UN DESA, n.d.) <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=5>.



## Strengthening Gender Statistics (SGS)

It is important to recognize the work that is being done to address gender data gaps more generally. For example, the World Bank's SGS project is built on a demand-driven model to improve the availability, quality and use of gender-disaggregated data worldwide. Thus, the project contributes to more informed and evidence-based policymaking, and it has been instrumental in identifying gender data gaps. This demand-driven framework speaks to the issue of data gaps on GYW participation, leadership and decision making, therefore it can improve evidence on gender-based challenges and identify data entry points. However, it does not provide a conceptual understanding of participation, leadership and decision making of GYW specifically, due to the lack of focus on youth.

## Participation

Several models and frameworks related to youth participation are described in detail in Annex 4. These encourage young voices in data production and programme implementation. They also allow understanding of 'meaningful' youth participation by providing models and tools to assess and improve the quality and extent of participation.

1. **Trócaire's concept of space** emphasizes that spaces (physical, social or digital) are not neutral but are sites of power, and that they can facilitate or hinder youth participation. This framework encourages a critical analysis of the power dynamics within these spaces and how they can be transformed to enable meaningful youth participation.<sup>23</sup>
2. **Roger Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation** is a widely used tool to assess the level of youth participation in decision making. Rungs that range from non-participation (youth are excluded) to high participation (youth share power with adults) categorize the extent to which young people are involved in various processes.<sup>24</sup>
3. **CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality's Flower of Participation** distinguishes between meaningful and non-meaningful participation. It represents participation as a flower, with petals that represent the key elements of meaningful participation, including informed choice, sustained involvement, shared decisions and more.<sup>25</sup>

Annex 4 also details Amartya Sen's Capability Approach<sup>26</sup> and UNICEF's Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup>World Bank, "Strengthening Gender Statistics", Brief, 26 May 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/brief/strengthening-gender-statistics>.

<sup>23</sup>Emma Newbury, Tina Wallace, The Space Between: An Analytical Framework of Women's Participation (Maynooth: Trócaire, 2014) <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/the-space-between.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup>Roger A. Hart, "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship", Innocenti Essay, no. 4 (Florence: International Child Development Centre, 1992) <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/100-childrens-participation-from-tokenism-to-citizenship.html>.

<sup>25</sup>CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, "Flower of Participation" (Amsterdam: CHOICE, n.d.), <https://www.youthdoit.org/themes/meaningful-youth-participation/flower-of-participation/>.

<sup>26</sup>Amartya Sen, Commodities and Capabilities (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985).

<sup>27</sup>UNICEF, Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation (New York: UNICEF, 2018) <https://www.unicef.org/media/59006/file>

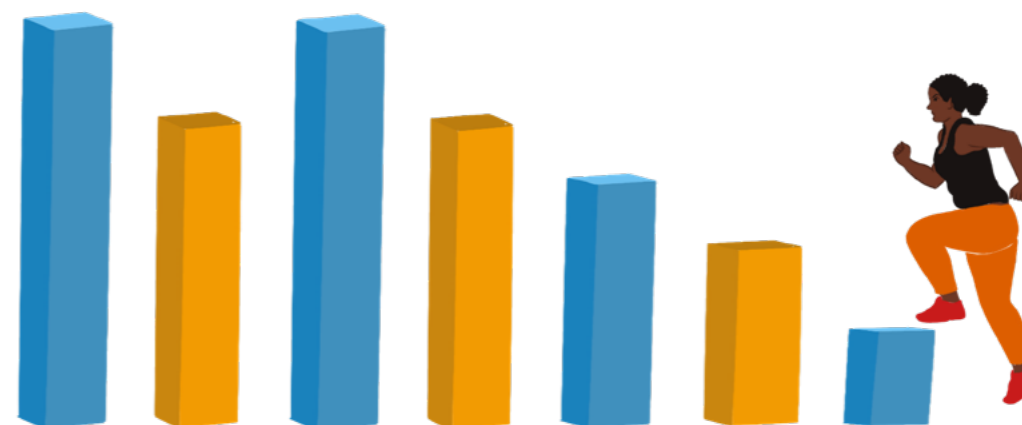
While these frameworks can be useful for measuring the impact of programme efforts to increase youth leadership and participation, they do not talk explicitly about data. They can be valuable in conceptualizing meaningful youth participation and thus allow for these concepts to be implemented for youth-focused programme-level data collection. However, none of the stakeholders mentioned that they made use of these frameworks to achieve meaningful participation of GYW in their programmes or data production. Although these frameworks challenge traditional power dynamics, entrenched hierarchies within society make it difficult to ensure that young people's voices are truly valued and heard, especially in environments resistant to youth engagement.

## Gender

Several frameworks related to gender are described in Annex 4, for example agency-based indicators of gender empowerment. One such framework is the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Framework, which encompasses various domains (see Table 6) and is thus a comprehensive model to assess and promote equality and empowerment.<sup>28</sup>

While the GEWE framework emphasizes the importance of breaking down systemic barriers, its definitions and measurements of leadership and participation can be limited. GYW may exhibit leadership through advocacy, community organizing, entrepreneurship or other means. A comprehensive framework needs to acknowledge and capture these diverse pathways.

Frameworks that provide agency-based indicators of gender empowerment can help stakeholders understand the ways to engage with young women in collecting data and thus help in the collection of data at a larger scale. They can also serve as theoretical lenses to frame concepts and develop specific questions related to GYW participation and leadership. However, they do not address issues around gender data gaps effectively. When applying these frameworks to data collection on GYW leadership and political participation, it is crucial to develop tailored indicators that capture social-cultural, infrastructural and political barriers to GYW and that use a youth-centred approach. Only then can they be adapted and applied to identify nuanced data entry points. Varying levels of comprehension and confidence in key concepts related to data and analysis represent further challenges.



<sup>28</sup>Celine M. Goulart, Amber Purewal, Humaira Nakhuda, "Tools for Measuring Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Indicators in Humanitarian Settings", Confl Health 15, no. 39 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-021-00373-6>.

## Data use

The existing data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making are already used to some extent by GYW themselves, by organizations that advocate for their interests, and by policy and decision makers. This section summarizes some data uses identified through this research.

### Use of data by GYW

The survey showed that GYW understand the importance of data collection and how data can be used. Across the survey respondents, 96 per cent said that collecting data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making is “very important”.

**“I volunteered with an NGO, it made me realise that I can do more [with data] and helped me prove myself to people and show girls around me that can too if they want.” – FGD participant, Jordan**

Echoing the concerns<sup>29</sup> often raised by young people and young feminists regarding a funding deficit for youth- and gender-focused programs, a significant proportion, 32% of survey participants, identified data on GYW as instrumental in securing additional funding to enhance GYW leadership.

Likewise, open-ended responses from the survey revealed how GYW make use of data as a tool to influence policies and raise awareness. They also identified key areas where data have helped in their programme activities and advocacy work, as well as the methods of data collection that they have engaged with. These include collecting primary and secondary data through mixed methods such as time-use diaries to understand the allocation of time spent on household labour with a gender lens.

### Why do you think it is important to collect data on girls’ and young women’s leadership, participation and decision making?

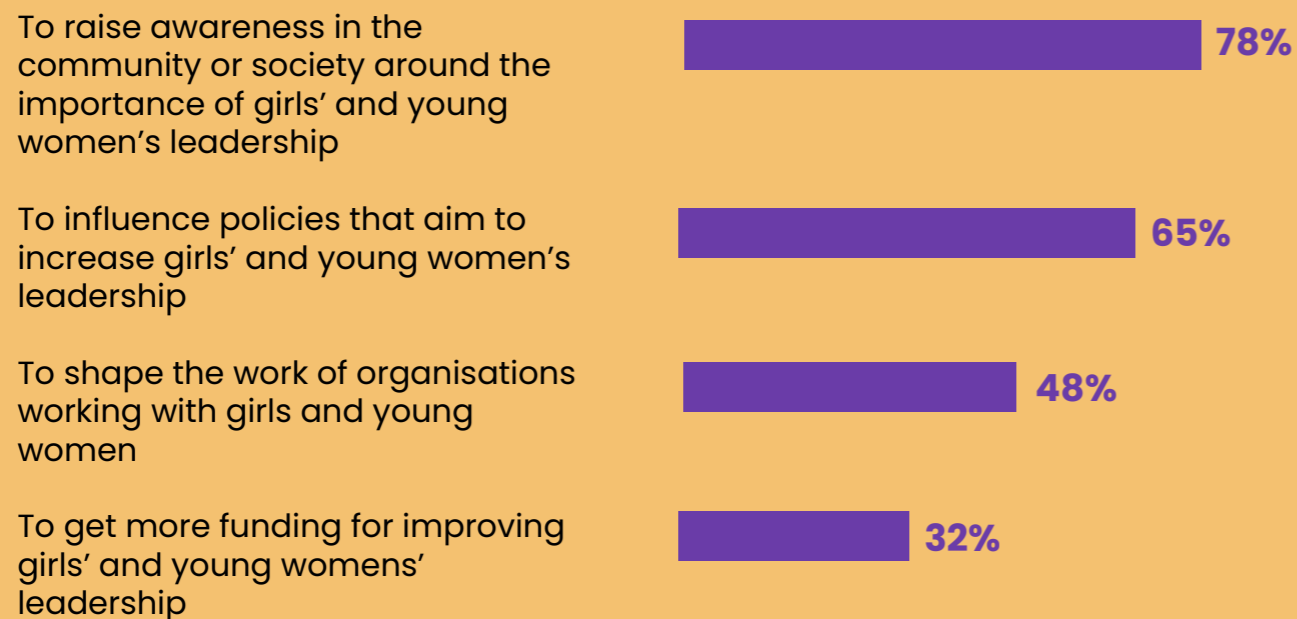


Figure 1. Most important reasons to collect data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making according to GYW (N=199)

The responses shown in Figure 1 highlight that GYW have multiple priorities. 78% of survey participants felt raising awareness of the importance of GYW leadership should be an important goal of data collection.

These views resonate with other findings from the survey and field research. In Jordan, the FGD participants expressed their interest in exploring data and saw data as a tool to empower themselves by understanding and addressing disparities as well as advocating for their rights.

| Use of data                            |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p><i>“We collect data about girls’ and young women’s thoughts on topics about teenage pregnancy, leadership and gender quality. We use it to formulate our programmes and projects in a way to bridge the gaps from the information collected for the girls to fully understand their rights and responsibilities in fulfilling these rights.” – Young woman from Uganda</i></p>   |
| <b>Design of community initiatives</b> | <p><i>“I collected data on the total number of persons with disabilities in two chiefdoms in my district for an organization called the Welfare Society for the Disabled. We presented the data to electoral management bodies and lobbied with them for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in the electioneering process.” – Young woman from Sierra Leone</i></p> <p><i>“We collect both primary and secondary data which includes qualitative and quantitative. We use this data to help us know which areas we should focus our work on. Have a clear understanding of what to implement. – Young woman from Sierra Leone</i></p> |

| Use of data                        |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Measurement of impact</b>       | <p>“Data around the impact we create on the ground and how the methods of advocacy are received by girls and young women. We use the data to analyse our strengths and weaknesses and as a result, get a way forward ” – Young woman from Kenya</p> <p>“As an advocate working with a youth-led organization that focuses on integrating the perspectives of girls and young women into societal mainstream, we collect data to improve on our work strategies.” – Young woman from Sierra Leone</p>                             |
| <b>Advocating for their rights</b> | <p>“Time diary on time allocation of household chores between boys and girls. It was used to engage stakeholders, parents and caregivers to share household chores between boys and girls in order to reduce the workload on girls so that girls can get enough time for their studies and personal development.” – Young woman from Ghana</p> <p>“We collected data on drugs and we have developed strategies and advocacy programmes around issues of drugs amongst young people and GYW.” – Young woman from Sierra Leone</p> |

Table 6. Examples of data use described in the survey by GYW

### Use of data by organizations

GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations use data to design their community initiatives, measure the impact of these initiatives and programmes, and advocate for GYW rights and interests. This sometimes entails the collection of primary data too.

“Almost all the information we have is the result of a personal effort. We go out and get it ourselves.” GYW-led organization, Jordan

However, this is mainly because government organizations can be reluctant to share their data widely, which results in GYW-led organizations collecting data themselves. This indicates the fragmented nature of the data and policy landscape.

Most organizations studied collect data regularly for the purpose of programming on GYW leadership. For example, She Leads country teams collect data and feed this information into the organization’s overall monitoring and evaluation efforts whereby programme impact is measured according to a theory of change. Country-level data are relied on to report on changes to social and cultural norms (barriers to GYW leadership) and on indicators related to the civil domain (e.g., civil society organizations having representation of GYW, GYW forming their own organizations and movements, and advocacy capacity-building of GYW), and in turn how this translates to political leadership/representation and to concrete policy change.

“All data [we collect is] from monitoring framework, e.g., how many CBOS [community-based organizations] we worked with, how many decision makers we worked with, etc., [we] continuously plan and collect this data.” – She Leads Country network member, Jordan

In Sierra Leone, She Leads staff mentioned that they are being trained in the outcomes harvesting approach which they normally use in adaptive programming – how to document change and compare and look at achievements using their theory of change. They also sometimes have to collect primary data on GYW at the community level to identify the girls who can actively participate in their programme activities and represent the voices of their communities.

“The [She Leads] network collects its own data from GYW and communities and uses secondary data from government and other agencies, we also collect a small portion of data for girls and young women who participate in the programme. – Policy stakeholder from Sierra Leone

In addition, the GYW-focused organizations use data more specifically to:

- align their impact with wider local and national priorities

“GYW organizations use data to advance youth leadership and political participation by collecting quantitative and qualitative data on women and girls from disadvantaged groups in project communities in order to meet their needs in our work and use the data to enhance and adopt local development plans in lobbying and advocating with state and non-state actors.” – She Leads Country network member, Mali

- strengthen their outreach

**"GYW organizations use data to advance youth leadership and political participation by collecting quantitative and qualitative data on women and girls from disadvantaged groups in project communities in order to meet their needs in our work and use the data to enhance and adopt local development plans in lobbying and advocating with state and non-state actors."** – Policy stakeholder, Jordan

### Use of data by decision makers and policymakers

Although we conducted few interviews with decision makers and policymakers, it is clear that data are essential in building evidence-based policies regarding GYW. A case in point is Uganda, where a representative from the Ministry of Gender and Labour shared their view.

**"In the absence of data, we can do very little to convince policymakers, authorities, and the government. There are also organizations that need our intervention, which can be properly done with data. For instance, when working with the Uganda Women Employment Program (UWEP), we need data on how many girls are in school or working, the total number of girls, etc., to make decisions on how to intervene."** – Policy stakeholder, Uganda

In Uganda, youth-led organizations and policy stakeholders have observed a growing trend in data disaggregation by age, gender and disability. This increasing availability of disaggregated data can be attributed to the utilization of various conceptual frameworks designed to collect specific data on young adolescent girls. Notable among these frameworks is the Sectional Framework for Adolescent Girls and also the Adolescent Health Policy implemented under the Ministry of Health, as well as national strategies on girls education, child marriage and teenage pregnancy. It was reported by the representative from the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (Uganda) that almost all sectors collect data on GYW. For instance, the Ministry of Education collects data on GYW in education from preschool to tertiary education – they collect data on retention achievement proficiency that are disaggregated by gender, age, disability, etc. The government also collects data on violence against children and violence against women and girls. Through this, they can create policies that make use of data-driven insights. However, the stakeholder was cognizant of the data gaps and the poor state of data.



**"The state of our data is not strong. Our data collection systems are still very weak."** – Policy stakeholder, Uganda

The policymaker further emphasized the need for improvements in indicators related to GYW but highlighted the slow pace of change within government systems.

**"Our indicators on decision making are still lacking and that is an area where we need to build capacity. Sometimes government processes are very hard to influence because they are predetermined. Systems are not as flexible to influence. Influencing policy can take 5–10 years."** – Policy stakeholder, Uganda

## Key challenges

### GYW data are not collected systematically

Comprehensive and reliable gender data are essential for understanding gender disparities, informing gender-responsive policies and tracking progress towards gender equality. However, the research illustrates the tendencies among various stakeholders to engage in ad hoc data collection instead of using a systematic approach, which often leads to complications and confusion. As previously noted, the lack of conceptual clarity on GYW participation translates into barriers to collecting data that can capture the key and intertwined aspects of GYW leadership and participation. A policy stakeholder mentioned that the SDG framework is used for reporting data and planning programmes

**"Our national regional planning is informed by other global and regional frameworks so there are similar development goals with our regional AU [African Union]. The AU collects data because we report periodically for the SDG. We report to the AU and the UN Charter on Persons with Disabilities. [We] report on several other projects under the UN."** Policy stakeholder, Uganda

However, it was also mentioned that there is limited knowledge at the local level of what participation means, especially for GYW, how to report that (e.g., what indicators to use) and how to measure decision-making at the national level. Several policymakers also commented that the data to review current systems are poor and insufficient to capture the various aspects of youth participation because of the lack of nuanced understanding. As a result, it is very difficult for them to fully understand the challenges faced and to devise solutions.

**"What we find is that we may not be able to capture the key indicators, especially indicators on participation because they are not so clear. We have a lot of outputs or process indicators and there may not be results indicators so that is a challenge. There are a lot of aims to increase the capacity of girls and young women to influence decision making in specific areas but those are the indicators we are not capturing at the moment." – Policy stakeholder, Uganda**

A policymaker from Jordan echoed this stance.

**"With all the focus being on economic empowerment, we don't have real data on other pressing issues such as violence, early marriage, and other social issues facing GYW." – Policy stakeholder, Jordan**

Thus, policy stakeholders questioned the 'authenticity of data'. Likewise, both policy and GYW stakeholders had very low expectations of data at the district and local levels, believing that the data are usually not rigorous or verified. In Uganda, this was attributed to the laziness of data collectors and district-level officials who try to take "shortcuts". Stakeholders indicate that, in some ways, this is encouraged by international donors to keep costs down – data collection budgets are slashed. The representatives from the Ministry of Gender and Labour were also mindful that the data are sometimes unreliable, but they made clear that they work closely with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) to fill gaps in the existing data. A youth officer from Kampala highlighted the need to monitor data collection for reliable data.

**"The state of the data is lacking, as it is not the best we can use." – Policy stakeholder, Uganda**

In Sierra Leone, the lack of systematic data was attributed to the poor implementation of policies by government authorities.

**"Laws are there, but there is no implementation; the government does lip service to their laws. ...A lot of Acts but no implementation framework; no political will around some issues that are in conflict." – GYW organization stakeholder, Sierra Leone**

It was repeatedly reported that existing data collection efforts are often irregular, they are not standardized, they do not use replicable methodologies, and they do not include coherent and shared definitions.

**"Lack of clarity on how we understand power and what we mean by political participation and decision making, not having definitions and not being able to fund work that can offer a standardized taxonomy on [monitoring and evaluation] indicators and reporting for GYW." – GYW advocacy expert**

## **GYW data collection and usage reflect existing power imbalances**

Funders and international donors have an opportunity to fund data-driven evidence-building projects; much of the data on GYW leadership and participation identified have been commissioned by international foundations and other large non-profit organizations. However, this can also mean that such entities dictate the agenda and methodology of data collection, limiting the engagement of GYW-focused and GYW-led organisations.

**"Also funding challenges since it's limited and driven by donors. So, data collection is influenced by agenda setting." – GYW advocacy expert**

GYW face challenges in having their voices heard and in participating in data collection due to various socio-cultural norms and barriers. The gender division in public and private spaces and the politics of movement often hinder their access to resources and avenues that could help them challenge the gender hierarchy. As a result, the valuable insights and experiences of GYW may be overlooked or excluded from data collection efforts.

Furthermore, gender stereotypes can reinforce the idea that men and boys are more competent or knowledgeable in matters related to data, leading to the exclusion of GYW from data-related discussions. This can be seen in the field of statistics, which historically has been dominated by men, and in the pronounced gender divide in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education where GYW represent only 35% of the field. Consequently, women make up only 20 per cent of science and engineering professionals globally. GYW also face adult-centric attitudes from older women.

"It is as if the older women do not trust us to make our own decisions because they doubt we can make the right one. It is a competition with them. Young women like us are also wanting to take advantage of opportunities as well but it seems the older women want to dominate. They always refer to their experience and age as a reason to take over. They say: 'I am older, I'm more experienced'." – FGD participant, Sierra Leone

In some contexts, there may also be stigma or taboos associated with certain topics – particularly those related to women's health, reproductive rights or GBV – which can deter GYW from sharing their experiences.

"Issues on sexual reproductive health remain taboo in our communities. There is silence around GBV amongst men and women." – Representative from GYW-led organization, Uganda

## GYW data are political

Finally, several stakeholders indicated that the use of data by policymakers and those in power was subject to criticism for their lack of focus on structural inequalities faced by GYW. In some ways, the choice of what data are collected and prioritized can reflect the interests and agendas of those in power. One key reason for this that emerged from the research is their reluctance to question the status quo, therefore they refrain from getting involved in narratives (such as those related to the empowerment of GYW) as it can threaten their power. Decision makers may choose to emphasize certain data points over others to support specific policies or narratives.

"Data is political. I really don't think the challenge is about collecting the data, [it] is about what data gets published and what data we put out – the reports are saying very different things, they consider different data. That's a big piece – who is collecting the data? The dynamics that they put in place – it could be hindering or enabling the change." – She Leads global team member

Overall, data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making suffer from several challenges, including a disconnect between communities and data collectors, the presence of power imbalances within the data and GYW advocacy sector, and the lack of a systematic and up-to-date approach to data production. These challenges result in a number of specific data gaps that are examined in the next section.

## 2. Data gaps

### Lack of data disaggregated by gender and age

There is limited availability and quality of gender-disaggregated data related to GYW participation, leadership and decision making at different levels (household, school, community, civil society, etc.). The research participants indicated that most data available are either on adult females or there is no indication of age. Other characteristics such as education, urban/rural areas and migration background are not considered either. The absence of such data is a contributing factor to limited awareness of the extent of GYW involvement in decision making processes.

"No age disaggregation, and focused on formal political participation of GYW, but not on other forms of power." – GYW advocacy expert



Policy stakeholders in Jordan mentioned that the national statistics lack disaggregated data and focus mainly on household profiles and economic indicators. A She Leads Country Coordinator shared that their national statistics do not have gender or age disaggregation and other lenses such as that of disability are also missing.

**"Nationally, we still lack statistics in the area of GYW's participation in leadership and decision making. In [our country], information on young girls is clustered into use by youth, and unfortunately, youth is identified primarily as males, so there is no particular information on girls and young women."** – She Leads country network member, Uganda

In Sierra Leone, the concept of a youth-focused initiative has emerged as a key category for data with the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and National Youth Commission and the National Youth Service just five years ago. However, most GYW-led organizations and GYW themselves felt that the focus "under the youth banner" has been on boys rather than girls.

**"I feel we need to define who is a youth or a young person because all the initiatives for the youth in my country, are for men."** FGD participant, Sierra Leone

The practice of collecting general data, which lacks representation and age and gender disaggregation was also reported in Uganda.

**"I don't think we have any specific or particular government data collection process targeted at the issues of GYW. I think it's still general and we need to be able to segment the different types of girls and young women. For instance, age matters as well as economic experiences and social background. We need a base online where we can go and find data specifically on girls and young women."** – Representative from GYW-led organization, Uganda

These insights confirm the initial observations made by She Leads around the lack of age and gender disaggregated data. However, it is clear that other types of disaggregation are also missing too, potentially excluding the unique experiences of many GYW.

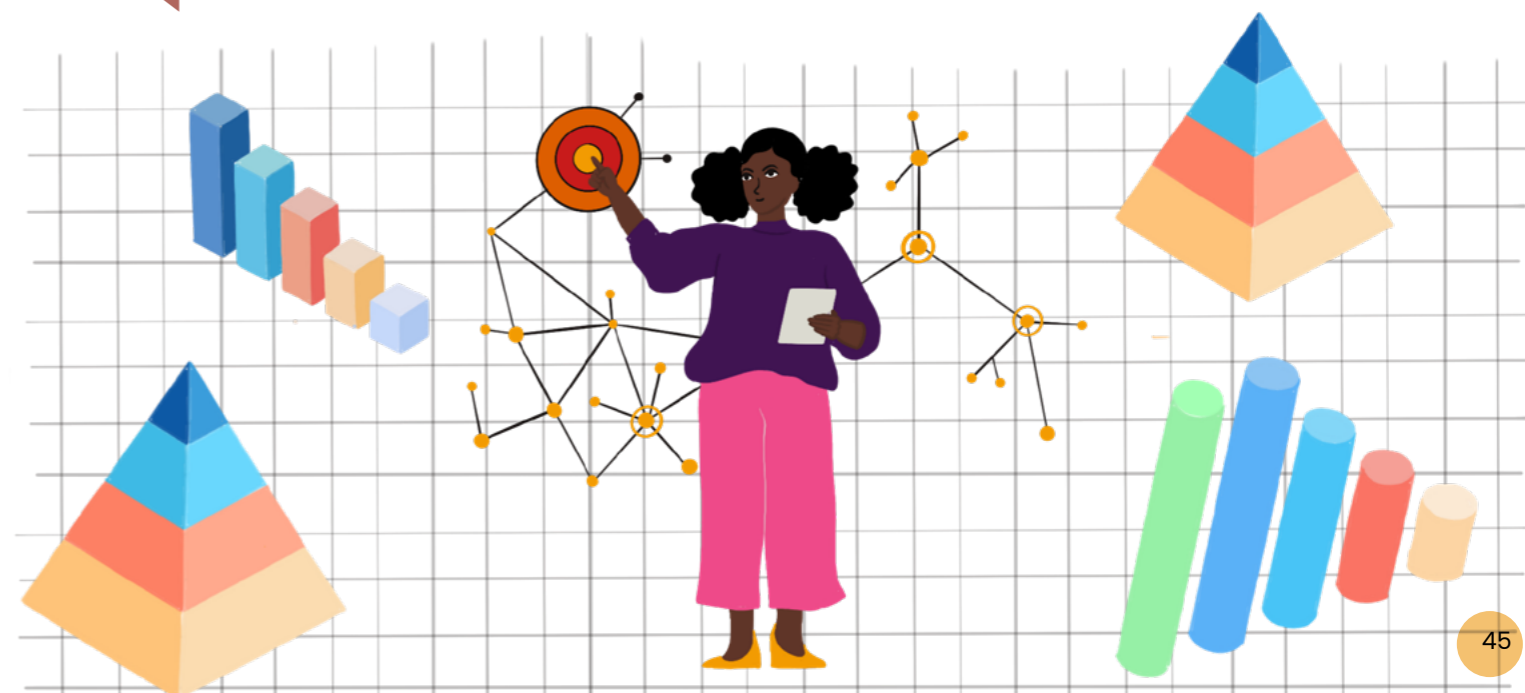
## Lack of data that reflects the lived experiences of GYW

The available data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making often provide only surface-level information about their lived experiences (e.g., baseline data or data for routine monitoring of programme outcomes). The reliance on such demographic data does not capture the complexities and nuances of GYW experiences. For instance, existing types of data may indicate the number of participants in a capacity-building programme, or the duration of the programme, but they do not reflect the true extent of engagement, learning or other outcomes.

There is also a lack of data that can reveal the effects of social norms on GYW's individual and community identities, on GYW experiences of leadership, on barriers GYW face in accessing leadership opportunities (eg., the impact of patriarchy, structural issues, issues around sexual and mental health) and on the impact of GYW leadership – data which can help GYW lead advocacy initiatives. There are several obstacles to collecting such nuanced data, including the use of traditional survey-based research methods (which are discussed in [section 3](#)).

One stakeholder shared their view.

**"We need real-time data on how many girls and young women have access to leadership opportunities at any level, how many girls are participating in decision making from the family, community and national level ... We also need data on GYW economic environment so that we may know how many girls and young women are able to participate in different economic opportunities. For instance, if a girl is not in school, we need to determine where they are and what kind of work they are doing. We also need data on social protection programmes that support girls who are not able to go to school and girls who face gender-based violence. These are very key to our work."**  
– Representative from GYW-led organization, Uganda



And the issue was highlighted repeatedly by the She Leads teams.

**"Anecdotal evidence vs concrete data, the data has been ad hoc, we are building on lived experiences, but we haven't been able to clean and analyse data. Not many people recognize the value of lived experiences, so data is important." – She Leads global team member**

The issue of power in informal spaces came up during the discussion with GYW. They reflected on how age discrimination feeds into the social hierarchy, allowing older women to exercise control apart from the patriarchal forces:

**"On the issue of older women thinking younger women and girls can't speak for themselves; I don't think it's not that younger women can't speak for themselves. For them, it's the control. It's the power. They feel like they are entitled to the small power that the men have given to women thus the younger women need to go through them to get access to such power. That's their logic behind it. They'd much rather occupy the space." – FGD participant, Sierra Leone**

To add further, existing data may not accurately reflect what leadership means to GYW, particularly in the informal spaces that are often more accessible to them.

**"We need autonomous spaces and connections to allow these GYW to access decision making space. I will give you an example, I am working with an organization on girls' power, and they wanted to produce data on them, but they ended up producing statistics on their political participation. This shows the data gaps, i.e., no age disaggregation, and focused on formal political participation, focusing on resources but not on other forms of power. What about what does power look like in informal spaces and how GYW can do policy and advocacy influencing? But how do you measure this power through data?" – GYW advocacy expert**

## Lack of local-level and community-driven data

As mentioned, the majority of those who collect data are either large non-profit organizations or foundations, in addition to NSOs or research institutions. Many governments do not commit to collecting local data and they only prioritize local data if an international NGO is working in their locale and forces them to intervene.

**"At the local level, there are huge gaps. If I single out a district like Iganga and I section out a village, you will find out that there is no data on leadership and decision making in that village in Iganga. It is also the same in a village deep in Kampala. There is no mechanism in place to collect, store, and disseminate data at the local level. Additionally, there is no deliberate effort to ensure that such mechanisms exist unless an NGO comes in and just says they will support the government in creating such structures." She Leads country network member, Uganda**

Little community-driven and community-generated data closely aligns to the GYW leadership realities on the ground. This is sometimes because GYW are not involved as co-leaders and this results in gaps in the data.

**"An institution like Makerere University, which is known for data collection, cannot collect data on girls in rural areas like Iganga because of their positionality in the ecosystem. Other organizations, like UBOS participate in data collection on a national level, but they are not keen on ensuring that the data and evaluation are participatory for girls and young women. But even if they are included, one wonders what position they are in in the data collection process". – She Leads country network member, Uganda**

Despite the importance of community-centred data, stakeholders deemed it difficult to create spaces for GYW and GYW leaders in communities to speak up about issues that affect them. This often results in their voices being silenced, as highlighted by a GYW-led organization in Sierra Leone.

**"Our tradition and culture do not permit community leaders or children to say what they need to say ... They tell us what we want to hear – tradition or culture doesn't allow them to speak up." – GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone**



As a result of such social norms, the reliability of data can also be questioned since it is difficult for GYW to report issues against their local communities. This perpetuates the exclusion of GYW from the data ecosystem, while the lack of community-driven data around GYW leadership results in several additional barriers and challenges. Some GYW may be excluded due to language, location or other barriers; data collection tools may not be contextually sensitive; the questions asked may not be fully relevant to the communities. Local communities should be supported and empowered to ensure the involvement of a diverse group so that comprehensive and inclusive data can be captured that reflects broad perspectives, experiences and insights.

**"A better methodology means strengthening the capacity of people in the communities so they can do that work. It should be very community-led."**  
– She Leads global team member

### Lack of accessible data

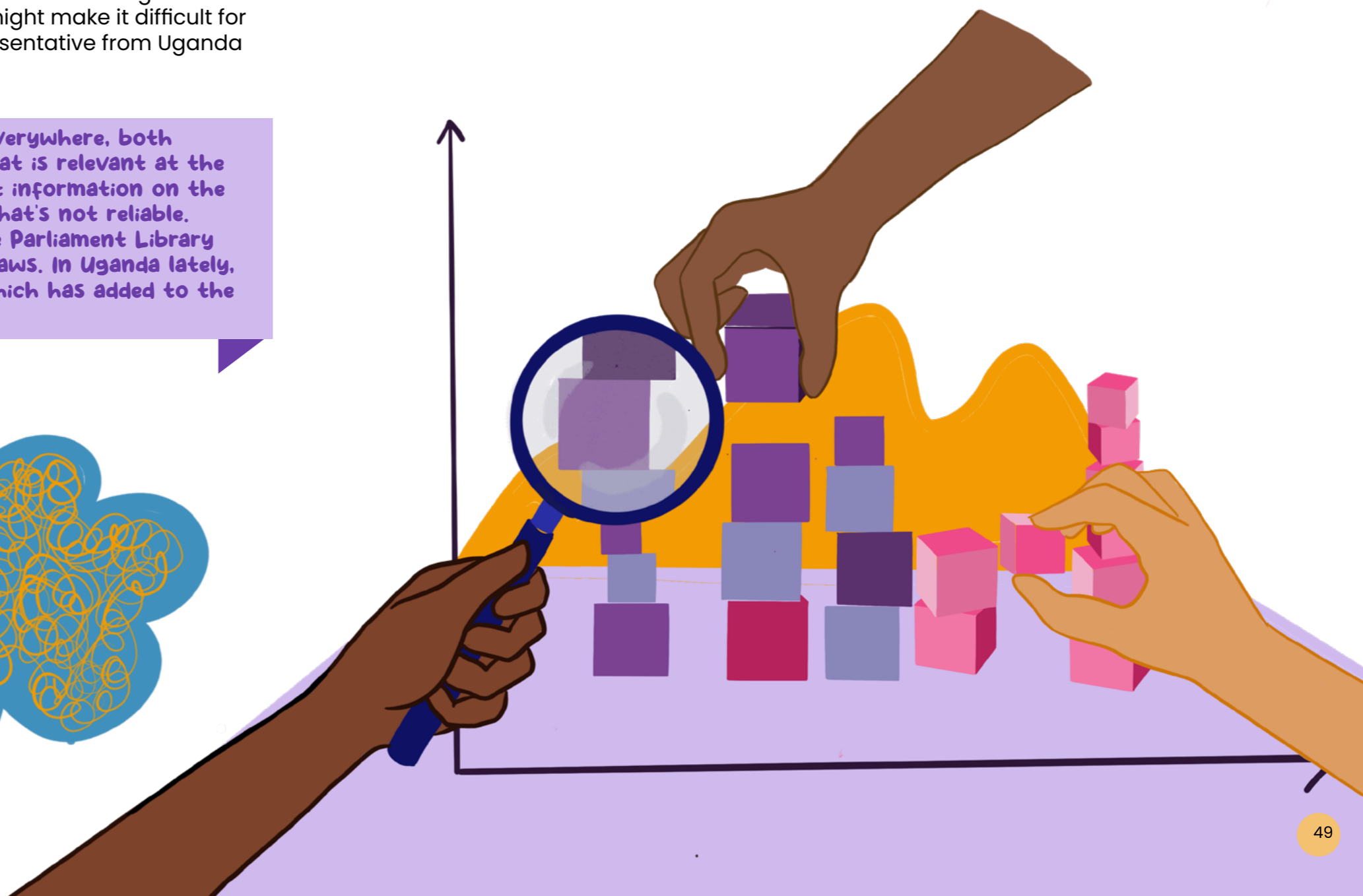
There was consensus among the research participants regarding a lack of access to data. Although there is a lack of high-quality data on GYW, even the existing data are not easily accessible. Gatekeepers must be navigated, who might make it difficult for everyone to benefit from the data. For example, a youth representative from Uganda described accessibility issues with regard to population data.

**"Accessibility is an issue. There is a lot of information everywhere, both online and offline, and getting the right information that is relevant at the time that you need it is extremely difficult. If you want information on the population, the information there is not updated, and that's not reliable. Hard copies are hard to get. You may have to go to the Parliament Library to get access to certain types of information, like the laws. In Uganda lately, we have had difficulty with our internet connection, which has added to the difficulties."** – GYW-led organization, Uganda

The data landscape is rife with power dynamics and many respondents were not satisfied with such an exclusive agenda around data. District and national government officers were highlighted as barriers to accessing data, with stakeholders seeing them as gatekeepers who institute unnecessary or cumbersome processes that hinder access. GYW organizations spoke of big challenges to access data.

**"I hope we can learn to share data, between different regions for the regional component, and between the country consortium itself."** – She Leads countrynetwork member, Uganda

Only half of survey participants (50.2 per cent) were aware of the data that exists on GYW leadership, participation and decision making (see Figure 2). GYW in Uganda had the greatest awareness (70 per cent of respondents) and GYW in Lebanon the lowest (28 per cent). Considering that this survey was distributed among GYW already linked in some way to the She Leads network, it is safe to assume that data awareness the general GYW population may be significantly lower than observed in this survey.



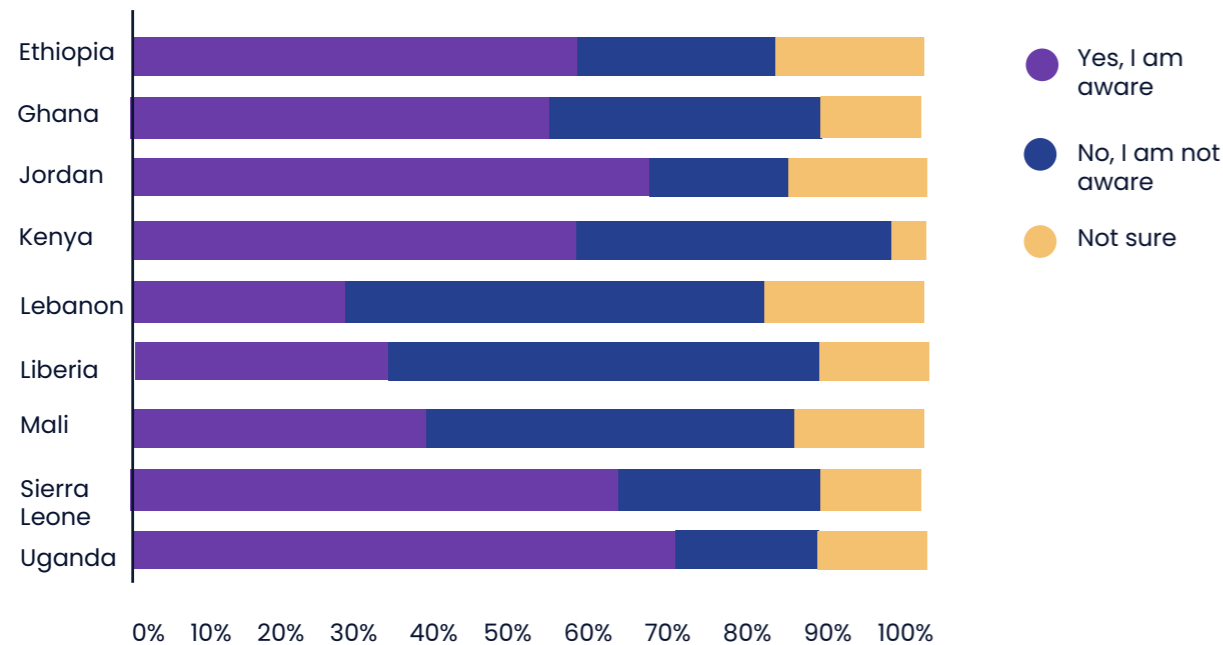


Figure 2. Awareness among survey respondents of data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, by She Leads countries (N=199)

Data awareness among GYW also positively correlates with educational levels of respondents (see Figure 3). This may suggest a need to make data and information accessible to GYW of all education levels, including those who may have not had a chance to complete their school or university education.

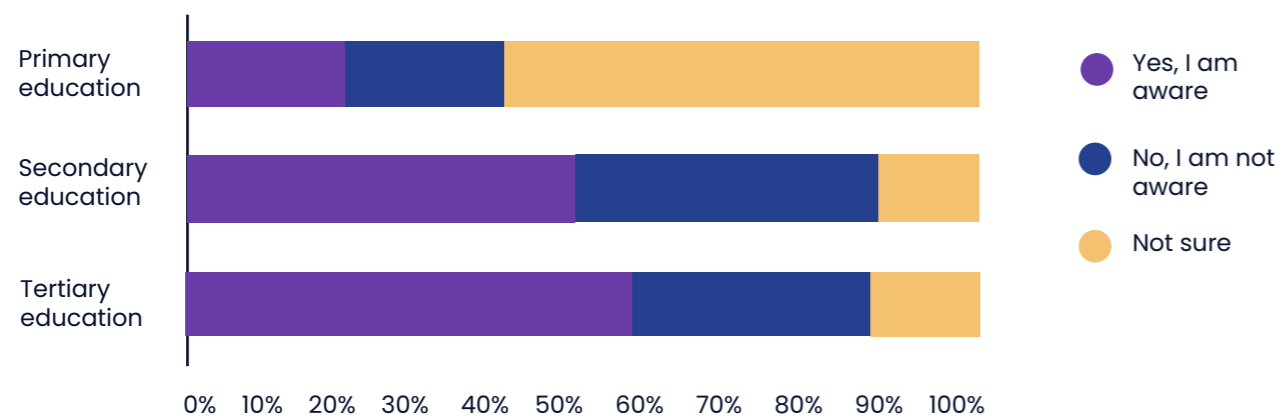


Figure 3. Awareness among survey respondents of data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, by educational attainment (N=199)

One research intern also spoke of the importance of having accessible data for grassroots organizations as well as GYW themselves.

**"Having such data available, organizations would be able to involve girls and women at the grassroots level so that they can start taking part in advocacy and governance." – Excerpt from research intern essay**

### 3. Barriers to collecting data

The key barriers to collecting data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making can be grouped into three categories (see Figure 4): (1) resource and infrastructure barriers, which mostly affect GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations; (2) institutional and policy barriers, which mostly relate to policymakers and data collectors in the sector; and (3) societal and cultural barriers, which directly affect GYW. Of the three, the latter are the most difficult to address.

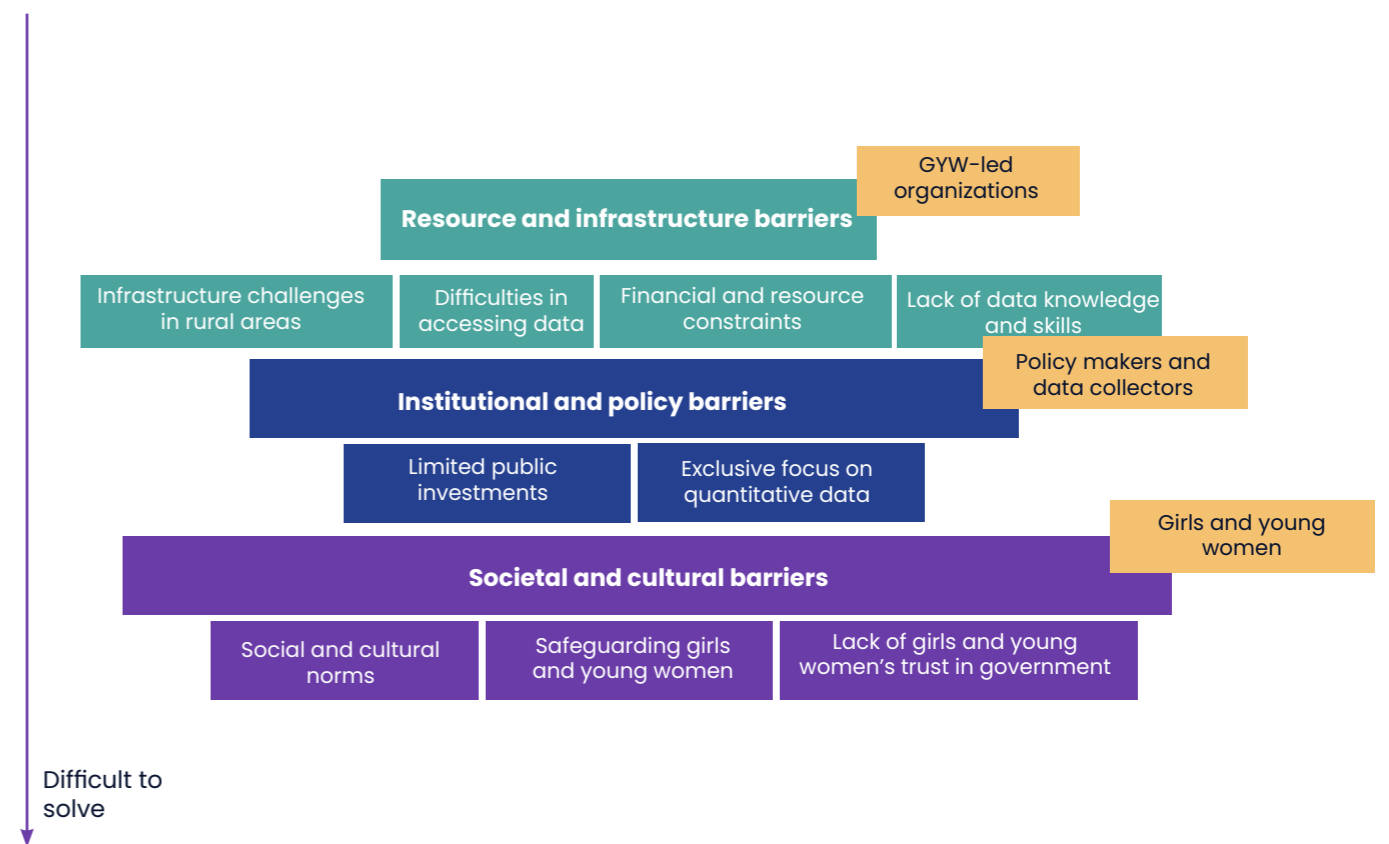


Figure 4. Key barriers to data collection on GYW leadership, participation and decision making

## Resource and infrastructure barriers

### Infrastructure challenges, including in rural areas

The lack of adequate physical infrastructure is a major barrier hindering the availability of reliable and comprehensive data in these country contexts, particularly in rural areas. For example, not being able to access certain regions due to poor transport infrastructure hinders GYW participation in research. Stakeholders also described the state of data gaps on persons with disabilities and the challenges around their engagement.

**"In terms of the data collection, there's a danger of having not engaged all girls or collected data from all angles because of the accessibility to those particular regions. Because we know some regions are not easily accessible"**  
– She Leads country network member, Kenya

### Challenges in accessing necessary data

Challenges in accessing data from government bodies and the time required to process permissions result in many GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations collecting their own data when needed. This can result in ad-hoc data of limited quality and a duplication of efforts within organizations already facing limited capacity.

Moreover, interviews in Jordan revealed that the lack of data coordination and collaboration between organizations themselves or with data collectors hinders progress towards collective goals. Similar themes were identified across most countries, including Uganda and Sierra Leone.

**"The national statistics department works in isolation from the national population department, academia works in isolation from the government, and they all need to work in harmony to collect data in all aspects to create policies."** – Data stakeholder, Uganda

**"When you ask institutions to give data, they don't like to share – sometimes you have to grovel to get information. It's a barrier. If you don't have an [memorandum of understanding] with them they will not deal with us; need to meet with them, about why you want the data – you can't just go – they will ask you for your service level agreement with the Ministry of Gender."**  
– GYW organization, Sierra Leone

### Financial and resource constraints of GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations

The lack of funding and resource constraints faced by GYW-focused and GYW-led

organizations directly influence their capacity to collect high-quality data and use it for advocacy efforts. Reportedly, only a very small proportion of global and national funding directly benefits young people, and often beneficiaries are a relatively privileged group of youth who are able to meet stringent requirements and who have access to the networks and relationships associated with these funding opportunities. This perpetuates the very issues of privilege and power.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Open Data Watch has argued that gender data financing is a crucial issue in the sector, with organizations seeking loans and grants from international development agencies.<sup>32</sup>

**"It would be difficult to get accurate data on this data collection if you don't have enough financial resources to go to all the urban and all the rural areas."** – She Leads Country network member, Ghana

The lack of gender data financing can lead to a lack of interest in projects and it can make it difficult for local actors to involve beneficiaries such as marginalized young people who live with disabilities, reside in rural communities or lack internet access or proficiency in the English language.

**"Our funding is really limited; we have to prefinance before funding comes. We have four staff. [It is] hard to keep young people engaged, they want fast big money and will look elsewhere. We only pay by the project – funded by donors; no subventions from the government."** – GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone

Resource limitations also encompass time constraints, lack of staff and expertise, and insufficient capacity to collaborate with peer organizations. Meagre resources were reported by participants in Uganda, which often results in unreliable data.

**"The time and budget limits placed on collecting data are sometimes not enough, which leads to inauthentic data. For example, the data collection meant to take a week would be limited to a day, and the budget may not be enough. These shortcuts negatively affect data collection."** – Policy Stakeholder, Uganda

GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations in Jordan described having to use "ad-hoc databases" that lack formal systems, standardization and quality control. This inevitably leads to compromises around data security and accuracy.

<sup>31</sup>Women Deliver, Equitable Youth Engagement and Co-leadership (New York: Women Deliver, 2023) [http://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-06\\_Women-DeliverV6-3-EN\\_Final.pdf](http://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-06_Women-DeliverV6-3-EN_Final.pdf).

<sup>32</sup>ODW, State of Gender Data Financing 2021.

## Lack of data knowledge and skills

The interviews with GYW-led organizations indicated a critical issue around limited understanding of data and insufficient skills to utilize data to inform and support their advocacy and programming. Moreover, some organizations experience very particular issues around data collection that they need additional support with, for example, accessing potential GYW research participants.

**"We have a lot of information, but we need real training to be able to use it."**  
– GYW-led organization, Jordan

**"I think outreach and mobilization is the hardest part [in data collection], we don't really know how. We post on social media, but then we also need to go and find people."** – GYW-led organization, Jordan

The lack of knowledge and exposure to data as a topic also affects GYW directly. In the FGDs in Uganda and Sierra Leone, several young women spoke of "lack of confidence", "low self-esteem" or the "technical nature" as being major barriers to their engagement with data, which relates directly to their lack of exposure to the topic. However, as other initiatives focusing on GYW leadership progress, there is potential to improve their data savviness as well.

**"It's just recently that we have girls that are willing to step up and take responsibility for data production. For quite a while when people are asked to come forward to fight for positions, the girls would shy away and that has given the boys the upper hand to lead those research initiatives."** – FGD participant, Uganda

Addressing the lack of knowledge and skills around data among GYW and GYW-focused and -led organizations may not fix the root causes around the issues faced. However, there is potential to empower the organizations and GYW themselves to leverage data for awareness-raising, evidence-based advocacy and programme implementation.

## Institutional and policy barriers

### Limited public investments and a lack of political will

Lack of funding for data production on GYW is a key barrier within the sector. More specifically, the lack of public investments and a parallel lack of political will or interest contributes to the issue. Although higher-quality data offer strong potential to advance national policymaking, some stakeholders noted that GYW leadership and participation is not prioritized by many politicians.

**"[There is] a lack of political will to really improve policies and government response by investing in data."** – She Leads global team member

Some stakeholders also considered if greater female representation in politics may result in more interest and funding dedicated to both the cause of GYW leadership and participation and data collection on the topic.

Finally, some stakeholders suggested that policymakers may lack confidence in accessing, understanding and using data, including that around GYW leadership and participation. While further investigations are needed to understand whether it is a matter of confidence, capacity or skills, some participants noted that, even when data are available, this may not always result in tangible policy action.

**"[There is a] lack of clarity as to what data can do. Even if you present good data at policy spaces, it may usually not ... change their decisions."**  
– She Leads global team member

**"Even when data is available, the key policymakers are not [always] aware, e.g., national statistical departments in a few countries would not be aware of the data available in their contexts, while we know that the data exists so there is a lot of untapped potential of the data which is not analysed."**  
– GYW advocacy expert

### Exclusive focus on quantitative data

Prioritizing conventional data collection methods emerged from the research as a key technical issue and barrier. Data and policy stakeholders highlighted that reliance on quantitative data does not provide a holistic view of GYW experiences of leadership, participation and decision making. As a result, important themes such as the impact of social norms on the lives of GYW remain understudied. Much deeper analysis is needed of the cultural and religious milieus in which these GYW have to operate.

To this end, both quantitative and qualitative data approaches should be used to gain a more accurate and nuanced understanding of GYW experiences to inform interventions that empower GYW leaders. Participants suggested that participatory methods and bottom-up approaches to data collection can help address the historic marginalization of GYW.

**"GYW have faced severe marginalization, they don't have the ability, opportunity, or resources to be able to organize or curate their data to fit into academic standards. Their literacy levels are lower, so they speak in the way that they understand. When we speak about methodology – we may disregard GYW and enhance that gap. It's important to invest in the qualitative data."** – She Leads global team member

Many participants were cautious of traditional methods of engaging with GYW in different programme activities. They questioned the approaches used for conducting research on their lives and also how the entire discourse on data is itself laden with jargon and driven by international donors. This makes it difficult to engage GYW at local levels. Participants emphasized the importance of telling GYW's stories and empowering them to address the gender data gaps.

**"It can help [local organizations] feel more prepared. Managing the jargon and discourse can help empower them too. But by giving them the same tools and practices we might be divorcing them from their local realities, unfortunately. In an ideal world, we stick to simple scientific methodologies of thorough research, meaning universities and research institutions play a key role in this data landscape."** – She Leads global team member

Finally, moving away from conventional research methods might give GYW greater ownership over the data collection process. This includes co-creation of research and also closing the feedback loop by communicating results to GYW in accessible and sensitive ways. It also means making the research safe and ethical for participants, therefore it is important to implement participatory research processes to ensure recognition of the broader political, social and cultural implications of what it means to engage GYW.

**"How is data presented in a way that is respectful? How do we demonstrate the impact that elevates the stories of GYW ... giving them a platform to tell their stories and show their voices? What are we measuring, what is important? What about her agency?"** – GYW advocacy expert

**"So many people come and do surveys and ask the same questions, and then we never hear from them again, so now we don't take it seriously."**  
– FGD participant, Jordan

## Societal and cultural barriers

### Social and cultural norms

Across most She Leads countries, a key barrier hindering GYW's voices, leadership and participation is the gendered division of roles.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the burden of household labour, research participants also mentioned early marriages, teenage pregnancy and other forms of GBV perpetuated in the garb of social norms, which inhibit the ability of GYW to participate in or direct data collection and research activities around the topics of leadership.

**"Some of the key barriers [to data collection on GYW] are basically the cultural norms and practices at the community level which prevent GYW to freely participate ... Men, boys and traditional and religious leaders are perceived to be the power holders at the community level where they are suited to make decisions on behalf of the GYW."** – She Leads Country Coordinator, Liberia

**"We have data gaps in everything. We're not allowed ... to deliver research regarding girls, [as opposed to] the males which have more power."**  
– She Leads country network member, Jordan

Such barriers were reported in Jordan, where the persistent influence of tribal and traditional norms on the GYW decision-making process and on opportunities for leadership is a challenge in advancing gender data. Despite marked progress, deeply ingrained norms still shape the experiences of GYW, with family and community responses playing a crucial role in determining their ability to participate in decision making. The power inequalities at home make GYW vulnerable to patriarchal norms and deprive them of their agency to participate in public spaces.

**"[A barrier is] the fear of community backlash. Even if you want to be involved, or take part, you are always worried about what they will say. That it is not right for a girl to be there."** – FGD participant, Jordan

### Safeguarding GYW

GYW might be exposed to threats to their safety in public spaces that hinders their participation in data collection, research or related activities. For example, GYW in conflict or otherwise dangerous areas may not be able to bring their voice to data collectors, even if the research takes place at the community level.

**"[There is] occupation of certain areas by armed groups ... We work with local NGOs and local languages and resources to really understand the communities. Instead of sending the staff away, we also bring the people we need to the big cities. [There is] a great risk in taking motorcycles, especially for young girls, so [we] need to hire drivers. Some girls can't go to work due to [armed groups]. So young men are being used in high-risk areas. At the very least, [there is] a security officer in every office to help the agents."** – She Leads country network member, Mali

**"[There are risks for] safety and security of GYW when it comes to participatory research implementation on issues related to them. [We are] trying to collect data in a society not favourable to them. Even young [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] advocates face similar challenges."**  
– GYW advocacy expert

Without adequate measures in place to ensure the safety and protection of GYW from sexual assaults and other forms of GBV, men are generally encouraged to take the lead in data collection and production. Infrastructural barriers posed by poor transportation networks reinforce the gender norms of not letting GYW freely access different spaces, thus making them dependent on their male counterparts. In this regard, the barriers to collecting data on GYW are complex and intertwined.

### Lack of GYW trust in the government system

Most GYW participants use social media as their primary source of data. They indicated that they would trust (national or regional) governments the least to collect data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, when asked about different sources (see Figure 5). However, this mistrust may speak to the lack of clarity around their own roles within the data collection process.



Figure 5. GYW trust towards data collectors (N=197)

The trust levels illustrated in the figure do not differ much by educational attainment (see Table 8), with GYW themselves remaining the most trusted source of data across all groups. However, those GYW who had completed tertiary education were less likely to trust universities and research institutes than those who completed secondary-level education (22 per cent vs 34 per cent), and slightly more likely to trust community organizations (55 per cent vs 48 per cent). This finding makes sense, considering that university-level education may mean more advanced critical thinking around data and information. However, it shows that different approaches may be needed to build GYW trust around data, depending on their previous exposure to and experience of the topic.

| Educational attainment of survey respondent | GYW themselves | Community organizations | International organizations | Universities and research institutes | Local government | National or regional government |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Primary (N=5)                               | 40%            | 20%                     | 0%                          | 40%                                  | 0%               | 0%                              |
| Secondary (N=62)                            | 74%            | 48%                     | 47%                         | 34%                                  | 13%              | 10%                             |
| Tertiary (N=130)                            | 65%            | 55%                     | 50%                         | 22%                                  | 15%              | 11%                             |

Table 7. GYW trust towards data collectors, by educational attainment.

Trust emerged as a significant consideration in Jordan, playing an important role in access to information and relationships. For example, there, trust is integral to enabling GYW and GYW-led organizations to participate in data collection efforts and in fostering a conducive environment for organizations to reach GYW. In Uganda, the policy stakeholders and GYW organizations indicated that GYW have a severe lack of confidence in the government system. There, participants expressed their indebtedness to the She Leads network for giving them a platform to participate in their communities.

**"We don't trust government information; we trust the NGOs more because they care more about doing it properly. Participation is good and the She Leads project is empowering us to take part in decision making and we appreciate that. Last week we had an engagement with national [Members of Parliament] to see how inclusive it is to the national budget as we are left behind and do not benefit." – FGD participant, Jordan**

**"GYW attitude is also another [barrier] where they don't want to get involved to an extent because their experience has made them lose confidence in the system so ongoing mentoring is needed." – GYW-led organization, Uganda**

Rebuilding trust between GYW and the government is a complex and nuanced issue. For a start, 'the government' can be interpreted differently, to also include public educational institutions or health and care services on a local level, for example. However, within the bigger picture, issues around trust, not being heard and lack of representation in the government all contribute to unwillingness to engage with data collection, research or impact measurement activities by stakeholders at various levels.

## 4. The impact of improved data

### Individual level: GYW agency and representation is improved

#### Better data collection can address existing power imbalances

The power imbalances between GYW and others in their lives are often key barriers to their leadership, participation and decision making. Interviewees agreed that collecting higher-quality data on GYW leadership and participation would provide clear evidence of the benefits of including GYW in different decision-making spaces. Some organizations provided examples of how data and work on GYW leadership are closely linked to other issues experienced by GYW, for example domestic violence.

"Husbands pose challenges to GYW – if we have strong data to sell our work to the community people – to show them what can happen if you send your wife to our programmes. With strong data to advocate for GYW you will see a reduction in domestic violence, improved development in communities, fewer abuse cases, and enough or more women to take leadership positions. Previously GYW were not part of community structures, but because of our data, now most GYW are in key decision-making bodies. You will see more women at the community level, more stakeholders taking it seriously at chiefdom meetings, men will change their behaviour." – GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone

Data that are informed and driven by the voices of GYW can also help focus on gender-related issues and challenge patriarchal norms. However, translating data into actionable law would also mean engaging with boys and men on the issues related to GYW leadership and participation. Research participants expressed a genuine need to sensitize men on the impact of their actions on GYW, and thus engaging boys and men in collecting data or in discussion around power could raise awareness.

#### Collection of higher-quality data can amplify GYW voices

Reviewing not only the content but also the process of research can challenge power imbalances and amplifying GYW voices. Currently, many data collection activities only include GYW to the extent that they provide information to data collectors, and therefore they are extractive in nature. However, if ownership of the data collection or measurement process shifts towards GYW, this would empower GYW in a wider sense. Co-producing or co-leading research can enable different stakeholders to inspire GYW to take on leadership and active participation roles in their communities.

"Data collection has to be done by girls and women. NGOs run by girls and women must be involved, these experiments are useful for implementation. All this is to reduce early marriage, to fight for their rights and to engage politicians. They must be enrolled and kept in school." – She Leads country network member, Mali

"GYW should be more engaged which can be done by giving the women the confidence or equal playing field to collect data, change the stereotype, let the women feel part of the system and be inclusive." – GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone

Taking new approaches to data collection – using more participatory methods or co-producing research – can also provide insight into the lived experiences of GYW leadership, participation and decision making and move away from the usual political angle on the topic.

#### Improved data can allow a more aligned understanding of GYW leadership, participation and decision making

The initial phase of the research identified a potential misalignment around the concepts of leadership, participation and decision making between those who collect data and GYW themselves. Through the survey, GYW were asked to share what forms of leadership are most relevant to them (see Figure 6). The results are telling: 82 per cent of GYW felt that leadership means advocating for the interests of other GYW, while 18 per cent saw leadership as being a local or national politician. This confirms that the leadership indicators currently used by many data producers that focus on political aspects (including SDG 5 indicators) do not align with the perceptions of GYW themselves. This is mainly because it is easier to count the number of elected local and national politicians than to measure the percentage of female leaders who are advocating for the interests of other GYW or other less formal forms of leadership. The latter means looking at the ways to measure the leadership of GYW using more nuanced data and indicators.

#### What does leadership mean to you?

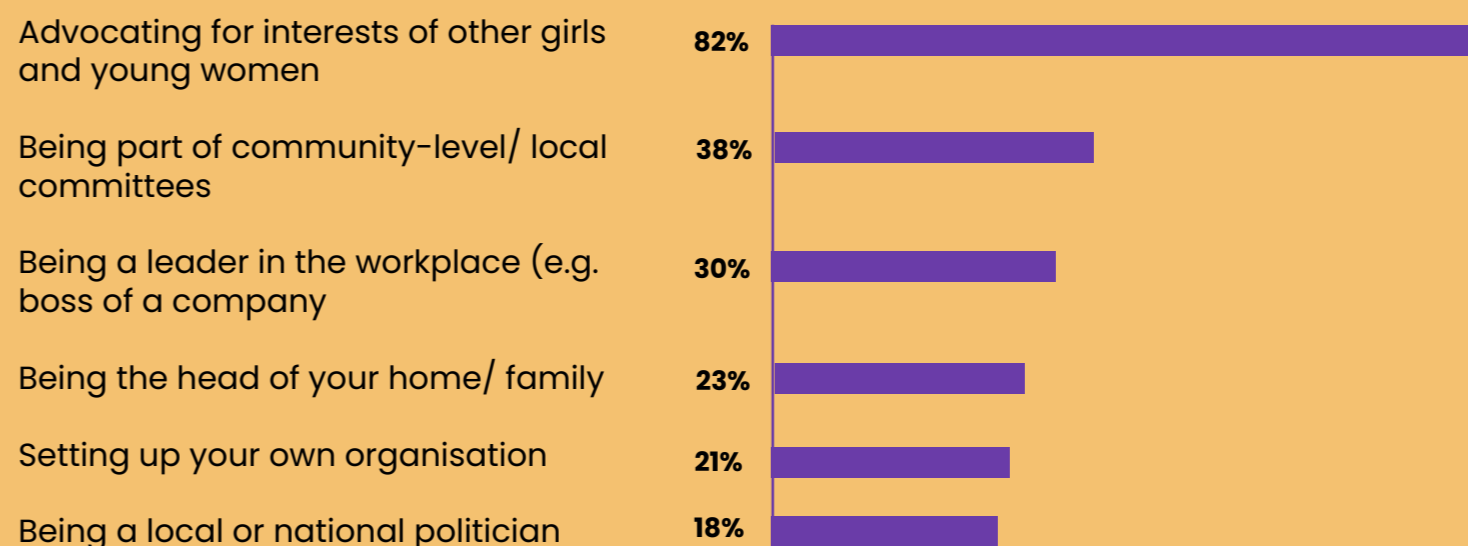


Figure 6. What leadership means to Girls and Young Women (N=199)

Similarly, when asked about participation in their communities, GYW gave a range of answers, with volunteering being the most popular form (73 per cent of surveyed GYW volunteer) and voting being the least popular (only 24 per cent of surveyed GYW had voted in local/national elections) (see Figure 7). The FGD in Jordan captured similar nuances.

**"I didn't finish school, but I took part in many trainings and volunteered with many initiatives. These experiences were my education and helped me leave an impression and change those around me."** – FGD participant, Jordan

This suggests that data collection on GYW participation should focus on both informal and formal participation. However, the low voting rates also signal the importance of exploring GYW political participation and the barriers they may face here (including low trust in governments). Meanwhile, the representative from GYW-led organizations in Jordan highlighted the need to broaden our understanding of participation, beyond economic participation.

**"The existing data primarily focuses on economic participation, such as workforce engagement and income levels, while neglecting other crucial aspects of GYW participation in leadership roles and decision-making processes, ... social issues such as violence, early marriage and mental health and well-being."** – GYW-led organization, Jordan

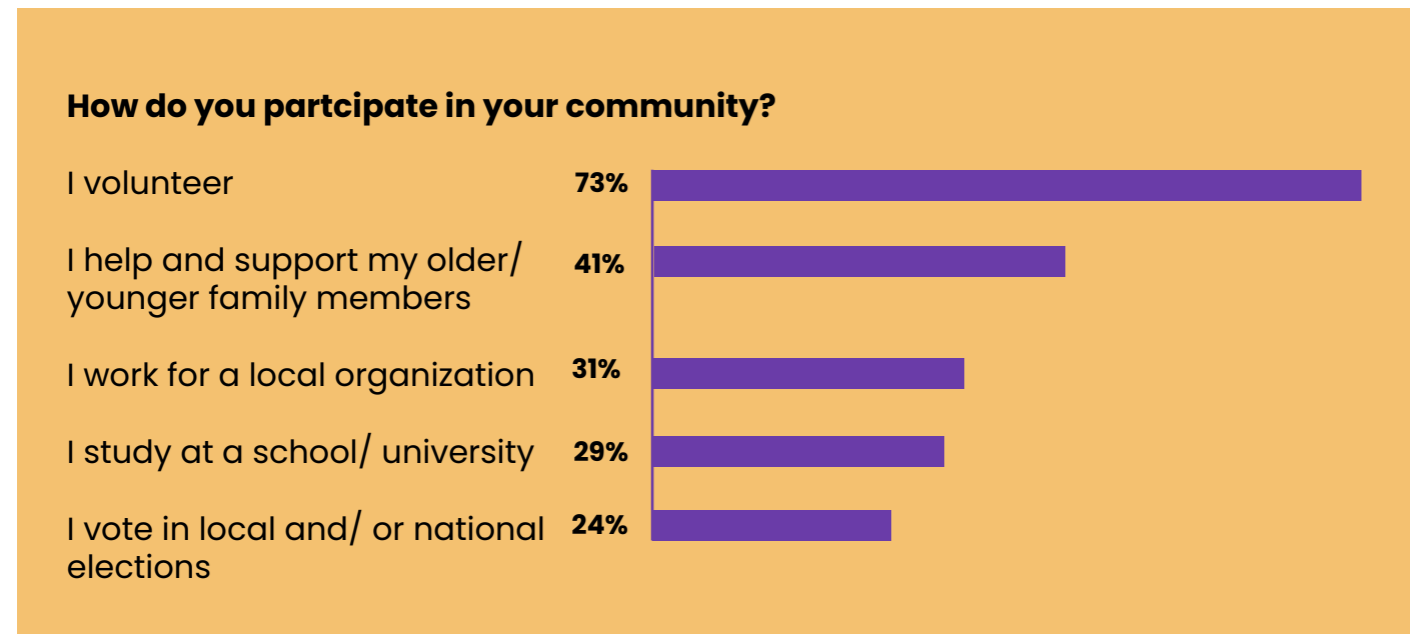


Figure 7. GYW participation in the community (N=199)

Finally, in terms of decision-making capabilities, GYW were asked to choose one type of decision that is most important for GYW to make themselves. Decisions around professional development were considered the most important, above family and family planning, and body and appearance. Few respondents considered decisions

around country/region and community/environment most important. This is unsurprising given the personal nature of other options. The results suggest that the concept of decision making may need to be reviewed to capture the many forms of decision making that affect GYW on personal and societal levels.

### In your opinion, what are the most important decisions a girl/young women should be able to make by herself?

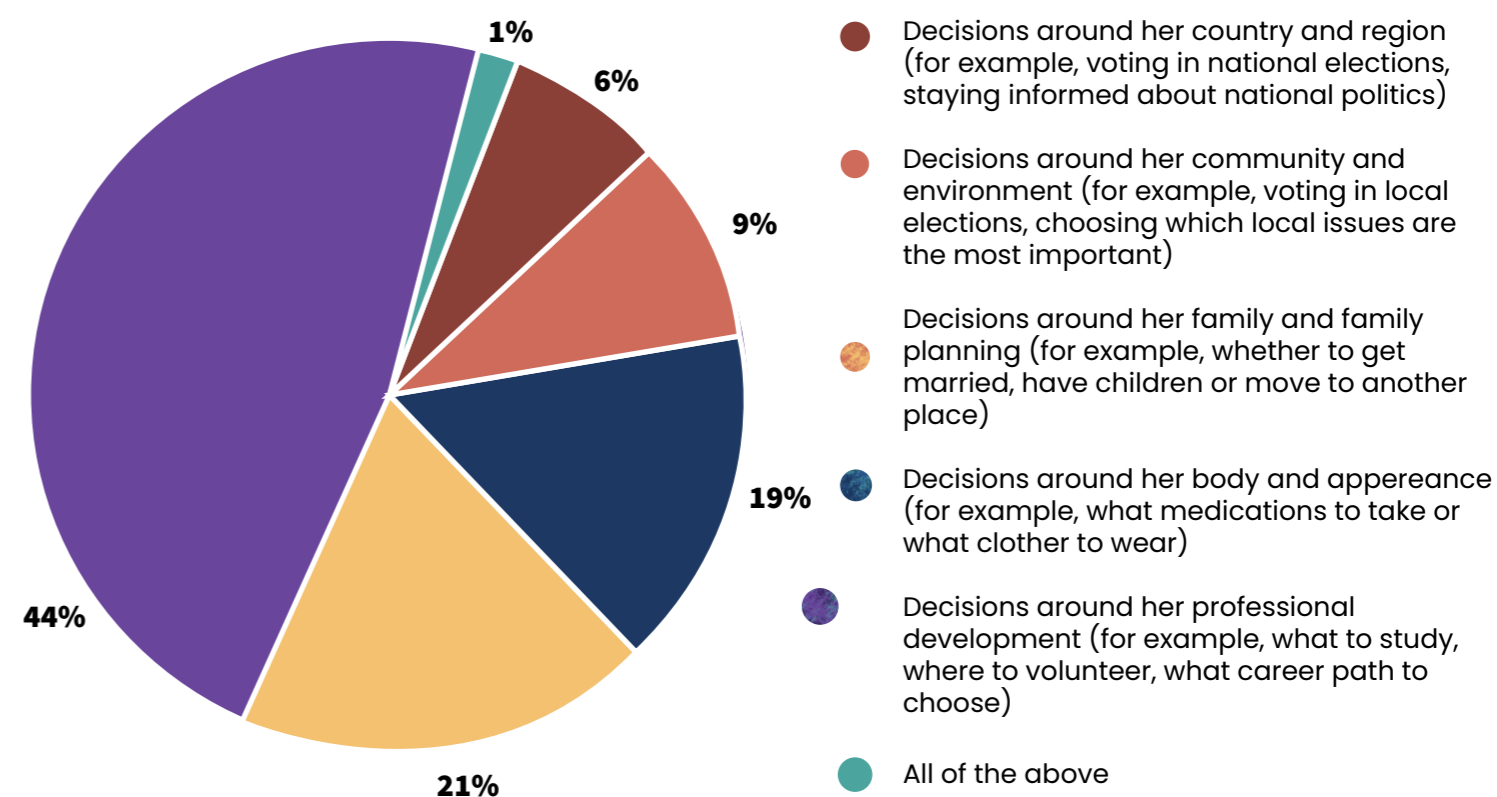


Figure 8. Most important decisions GYW should be able to make themselves (N=199)

These results were corroborated by those working in GYW advocacy. They agreed the concepts of leadership, participation and decision making are complex and many nuances are often not captured by those who collect data. They also added that these topics are closely interrelated with other issues, e.g. GYW's sexual health, and seeing them as separate may provide an incomplete picture of GYW realities.

**"There's a gap between young people's empowerment, participation, and civic engagement. Participation [includes] ... the skills you need to have to participate, e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy. There's a lot of work that international actors are doing to empower GYW but how do we measure that? An empowered girl is able to initiate safe sex. How do we measure empowerment? No tested/validated data instruments [exist]."** – GYW advocacy expert



## Organizational and policy level: progress has been made on GYW leadership, participation and decision making

### More opportunities to engage communities and decision makers

Improved data collection is a powerful means of increasing the visibility and representation of GYW in decision making processes and various leadership roles. For example, it can serve as evidence of GYW contributions and achievements, and it can serve as a strong starting point for why these conversations are needed.

"[Lack of data] affects their own participation in the country and in the sessions where they don't know their rights, they don't have enough information on how to have access, how to participate in political activities and in our sessions as well. So it is keeping their opportunities limited because they don't have access to all this data." – She Leads country network member, Ghana

Quality data collection can also enhance trust and credibility among stakeholders, leading to better collaboration and partnerships. This also includes ensuring that data are valid and credible, for example by implementing strong data management systems and other quality assurance measures to build trust. However, while data can serve to build trust among communities, organizations and policymakers, a level of trust is also needed to collect high-quality data: it is ultimately a two-way process.

"It is difficult to get information because people are scared to give personal information, but we have built the trust for them to be able to share with us." – GYW-led organization, Jordan

### Stronger evidence and data-driven advocacy

Another important outcome of collecting more and higher-quality data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making is the various opportunities to improve advocacy through the implementation of evidence-based approaches. Many stakeholders noted that decision makers and policymakers are more likely to take action based on tangible data that is presented to them.

"The difference will be really visible because you know, instead of working with suggestions, assumptions, having the exact data for the decision makers is a way for better advocacy." – She Leads country network member, Uganda

"Data brings evidence, and people pay attention to evidence. We need to build a stronger story that can support advocacy." – Data stakeholder, Jordan

An example of evidence-based advocacy being useful to engage with policymakers and other stakeholders emerged in Uganda. Here, research on sexual reproductive health issues of women with disabilities has benefited the local population by sharing the findings with health officers, paralegals and policymakers. Through their engagement, GYW were able to hold political representatives to account for their gender-based issues. Similar views were expressed in Sierra Leone, and the research interns also agreed on the importance of evidence-based advocacy and the role of GYW in dialogues around data.

"We got a small fund of \$7,000 last year and we are looking at women who had real problems during COVID: how are they going to recover in terms of sexual reproductive health issues. The money has done wonders, we have trained the district in gender-transformative approaches to ending violence. We have done research on all those services and our paralegals are taking advantage of this. We have invited organizations that are willing to come and work together to catalyse change in the social norms that have kept women behind."  
– GYW-focused organization, Uganda

"If you want data on reproductive health, doing research and collecting data helps you make the change because it is first-hand information that you are getting to present to the change makers or policymakers. That is why data is trustworthy because you get first-hand information to work with."  
– FGD participant, Sierra Leone.

"More GYW could be trained on various data collecting tools to start meaningful participation and also so that they can understand the need for and importance of making advocacy evidence-based ... [Each] time they want or are demanding something from the community or duty bearers they are sure of what they are saying plus they also have evidence showing their complaints and wants."  
– Research intern, essay excerpt



## 5. Opportunities to improve data collection and measurement of GYW leadership, participation and decision making

It is clear that data collection on GYW leadership, participation and decision making suffers from challenges that often are systemic (e.g., government mistrust or social and cultural norms). However, the research also uncovered many strengths among stakeholder groups that can contribute to bettering the data systems concerning GYW.

### The role and potential of GYW

GYW can take a much more active role in data collection, research or impact measurement. They are personally interested in advancing the leadership of themselves and their peers, so are likely to be enthusiastic about the topic and can be strong advocates for research taking place. Moreover, they have the strongest links with other GYW and within their communities: this can translate into GYW supporting data collectors with outreach or dissemination of research findings in the community.

**"We, the girls, can do the best research on girls and young women because everything begins with us. We have the best access because we are already in our communities or ghettos."** – FGD participant, Uganda

GYW can also be the best 'sense checkers' of research findings or data, helping to analyse, understand and contextualise the results.

**"Data is key to every community, mostly when we want to have the figures of girls and women participating in leadership but also in solving some of the challenges that the community faces in general. The need for having data is very important since young girls and women can now be capable of involving the relevant county government authorities in charge of handling data for the purpose of strengthening policies and making sure that their implementation is smooth."** – Research intern, essay excerpt

### The role and potential of GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations

GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations can strengthen their participation in data collection and research activities. Often, they are the ones to use the data collected, either for their own programming or to advocate and influence decision makers. They also know the local culture and contexts. This knowledge can support and guide data collectors working at a wider scale (e.g., NSOs or international organizations) to ensure that data collection methods are sensitive and appropriate to GYW.

**"[We are] working with already existing structures like the local council. We have a very good working relationship with them. When it comes to data collection on the local level, we are able to collaborate with the local council to get data. This is the same for the local government, which is the Kampala City Capital Authority. It is essential for us to maintain a good working relationship with these entities in order to get data that is accurate and timely."** – GYW-led organization, Uganda

With the right support and resources, GYW-focused and -led organizations also have the opportunity to lead or co-lead research and data collection. They know the most pressing issues around GYW leadership and participation and have close connections with GYW.

**"GYW-led organizations ... have the opportunity to collect data on girls and young women especially those in informal leadership, participation and decision-making in the various communities to help us get enough data on the issue for collective and meaningful advocacy. Data can be collected on their own members (GYWs) on their leadership achievements, community participation and decision-making."** – Research intern, essay excerpt

### The role and potential of foundations and large organizations

Foundations and large international/regional/national organizations currently conduct many data collection activities around GYW leadership, participation and decision making: they often have the funding, resources and capacity to do this. They are also often trusted by GYW organizations and GYW who have less trust in their own national or local government. However, some strengths seem not to have been realized yet. For example, these organizations are in a very strong position to enhance the data capacity and knowledge of local organizations and movements. They can also collate findings across different countries and regions, and encourage sharing and learning at a higher level, potentially involving decision makers and policymakers too.

**"My idea is that UN Women and gender-sensitive agencies such as UNICEF can conduct more and better research to help get more data ... to facilitate advocacy on GYW leadership, participation and decision making. Such data would help better understand the existing data gaps and advocate for girls to participate, lead and take an active part in decision making [which] will aid in achieving SDGs 5 and 17."** – Research intern, essay excerpt

## The role and potential of decision makers and policymakers

While only a few decision makers and policymakers were interviewed for this research, they too play a particularly important role in the GYW data ecosystem. Their strengths and areas of opportunity depend significantly on the contexts within which they operate; however, they ultimately have the opportunity to advocate for evidence-based policymaking at local or national levels. They can advocate for more funding to improve data systems, support statistical offices to collect gender- and age-disaggregated data, and build connections and trust between themselves, and they can allocate more funding to GYW and organizations that advocate for GYW interests to allow them to invest in data.

*"I connect closing the data gap to gender equality and reaching that. Why – because in this ideal situation, we would be forced to change our situation. Clearly seeing the situation and relinquishing our power and GYW taking the lead of the work that is done. It will transform even our resource structure. It will force us to think about our structures. It's actually data that limits our decision making, the more data and high-quality data we have, the more action we can take. It would translate into a better fight for gender equality".*  
– Data stakeholder

Recognizing the key challenges identified throughout this report, as well as the strengths and opportunities, the next section considers recommendations for different stakeholder groups.

# Recommendations

The research shows that a number of stakeholder groups and interconnected issues are involved in the ecosystem of GYW advocacy and data around leadership, participation and decision making. The following recommendations have been developed for different stakeholder groups; however, there are some interlapping areas of responsibility.

## The concepts of GYW leadership, participation and decision making should be reviewed and expanded

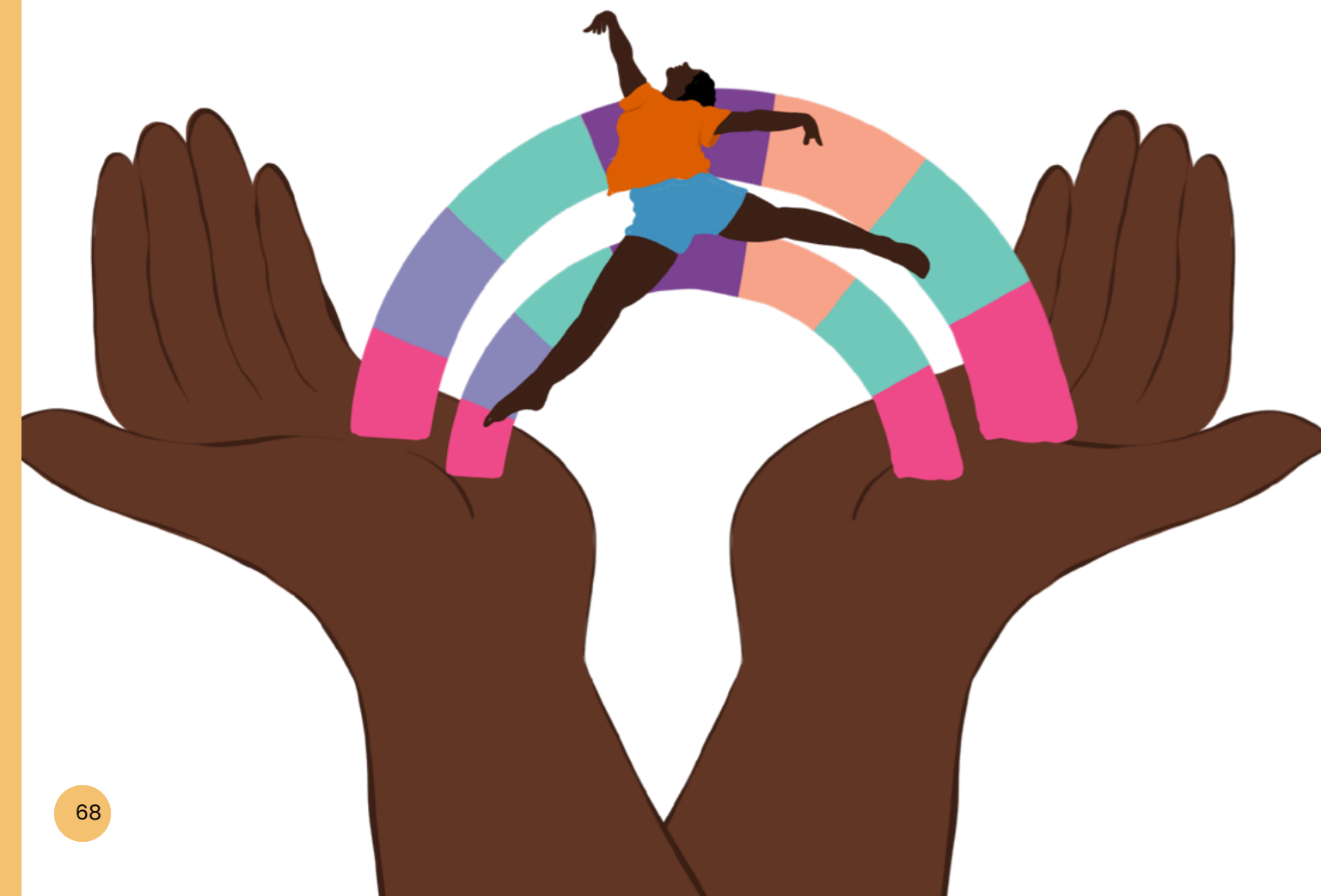
Most relevant for: data collectors (foundations, large international and national organizations, research institutions)

A key finding of the research is the wide discrepancy in how GYW leadership, participation and decision making are understood by those who collect/procure data and GYW themselves. Although the currently available gender data often focus on political forms of participation, the survey and FGD revealed that GYW have a much broader understanding of what these concepts mean to them.

Future research into, and data collection on, GYW leadership, participation and decision making should take into account the following:

- **GYW leadership** should focus on that at the community level (e.g., advocating for the interests of other GYW or being part of community-level and local committees).
- **GYW participation** should include forms of informal participation (e.g., community volunteering, supporting family members, working for local organizations). In particular, volunteering needs to be acknowledged as equally important as the political participation of GYW.
- **GYW decision making** should embed personal decisions that GYW must make in their lives. This includes exploring whether GYW can make autonomous and informed decisions around their professional development (deemed most important by surveyed GYW), family planning, and their bodies and physical appearance.

Similar studies could be conducted to compare the understanding of these concepts between younger and older women, as it is likely that this changes over their lifetimes. For example, it is possible that women's perceptions around leadership and participation shift significantly as they enter the job market, have families or reach voting age. Similar research would be important to find out how boys and younger men understand these concepts in comparison to GYW.



## Participatory research approaches, well-rounded measurement frameworks and bottom-up data collection methods should be employed

Most relevant for: data producers (foundations, large international and national organizations, research institutions); GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations  
The research has identified the lack of a coherent conceptual/measurement framework to work on gendered data gaps, and a tendency to explore GYW leadership, participation and decision making through more conventional, often quantitative methods. These methods may be perceived as exploitative and they lack space to demonstrate the nuances of the issues at hand.

More participatory and creative research and data collection methods should be employed instead. First, GYW (or GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations, if the research is conducted by a large organization) have strong potential to lead, co-lead or co-produce parts of the data collection process. They can identify the most pressing research questions, design/review data collection tools, analyse findings and validate results. They can bring nuance and context into the research which can be missed when it is conducted by those who are not based within communities.

Including GYW (or the organizations working with them) would also help another key barrier identified in this research: lack of trust. Although this is particularly prominent with regard to governmental sources, GYW indicated that they were more likely to trust social media sources than research institutions and universities. Inviting GYW to participate in the research process may increase their exposure to and experience around data, contributing to greater trust and stronger critical thinking in the future.

**"More consultations with data users should be held, given that both of them benefit – data producers and users. This will also go a long way toward improving perceptions of transparency and collaboration, which are the foundations for building trust." – Research intern, essay excerpt**

Moreover, research teams should move away from quantitative data collection tools and embed more qualitative or creative data collection tools. To amplify GYW voices and their experiences of leadership, data collectors should consider utilizing one-to-one interviews, case studies and FGDs, as well as some creative tools such as walking interviews, photovoice or roleplay. Although this may mean higher research costs and longer research timelines, these investments will generate higher-quality data that more accurately reflects the experiences of GYW.

## An intersectional approach to data should be embedded in data collection

**Most relevant for: data collectors (foundations, large international and national organizations, research institutions), GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations**

Even before this research was commissioned, She Leads identified a lack of gender- and age-disaggregated data. This is an extremely important data gap that needs to be addressed and embedded in any data collection as a norm. However, the research findings also suggest that it is important to explore other potential factors around GYW leadership, participation and decision making. Factors such as the location of GYW (rural vs urban), religion, education and disability must be explored to better understand what experiences of leadership, participation and decision making GYW have.

**"People who relate to different cultures and contexts should collect data. The issue of intersectionality should be brought to those who collect data, so they don't look at things as they are and include other components that broaden the spectrum of the data. They need to also collect the data with empathy and care." – GYW-led organization, Uganda**

Ideally, these approaches should be embedded both by those who collect GYW data for a particular research study or for measuring the impact, as well as by those undertaking regular data collection practices on local and national levels.



## Data capacity, knowledge and skills of GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations should be strengthened

**Most relevant for: foundations, large international/regional/national organizations, decision makers and policymakers**

The research has shown that GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations are the part of the data ecosystem with the most potential to impact the collection of higher-quality data. They have links with communities and GYW, they understand local contexts and nuances, and they often already have some expertise or capacity to collect and use data. However, these organizations may not receive the support needed to build on their strengths and improve data collection and measurement.

**"Local organizations can help collect but also interpret the data, they have a fantastic contextual understanding ... They work with community leaders so they have more credibility." – GYW advocacy expert**

However, there are stakeholders who work with these organizations who have more expertise and experience in data collection, e.g., international non-profit organizations. While they often conduct research themselves, these stakeholders could allocate some of their funding and efforts to strengthen the capacity of local organizations around data. In addition, digital engagement in data collection may be an important theme to address, as it could enhance the access or security of GYW.

At the same time, GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations have an opportunity to seek more partnerships and opportunities to strengthen their data capacity. Partners may include local universities, students who are active community members, other community organizations that are collecting or using data, or larger national/international organizations that offer training or support. This would encourage local GYW organizations to conduct their own research that can help local advocacy efforts, evidence-building or programming, and would also ensure that local GYW organizations can support other data collectors who may conduct research in the area.

## More shared learning spaces should be established

**Most relevant for: foundations, GYW-led organizations, large international/regional/national organisations, decision and policymakers**

Another important research finding is the lack of clarity on what happens after any data collection or impact measurement activities. Some GYW and organizations that advocate for their interests had participated in data collection activities, but they were unsure what actions were taken as part of the research. Respondents also mentioned difficulties in understanding the impact of working collectively in conducting research, which sometimes results in duplication of data collection efforts.

The learning spaces should also consider how to communicate findings to the wider public. A lack of accessible data was mentioned by both GYW organizations and GYW themselves. Where research or data collection is conducted, information must be made accessible and available to those closest to the issues at hand. This includes reviewing the language used and the formats of the findings. It is also important to remember that GYW with different educational attainment may access information through various pathways and understand it differently.

Considering how broad and interconnected the topic of GYW leadership, participation and decision making is, there is a strong need to share and compare learnings among all stakeholders – GYW and GYW-led organizations, data collectors, and decision makers and policymakers. This provides the opportunity to understand GYW leadership, participation and decision making better, and to build a stronger evidence base that can be used for GYW advocacy at different levels.

Moreover, improved collaborations between stakeholders would improve data collection practices and processes, rather than maintain the status quo of working in silos. There is a clear need for interventions that support knowledge and data sharing among partners to enhance outreach, to track progress, to share learning and to maximize impact.

## Evidence-based policymaking should be prioritized

### Most relevant for: decision makers and policymakers

To be able to advance GYW leadership in a meaningful way and make policy changes, evidence-based policymaking approaches should be prioritized. Particular opportunities exist for policymakers to have an impact:

- Policymakers can facilitate GYW-focused and GYW-led organizations' access to donors to provide financial and technical support. This will strengthen data ecosystems at the local level, enabling GYW and GYW-led organizations to drive change through data-driven initiatives.
- Policymakers can initiate gender data studies nationally. Beyond requiring NSOs to include gender- and age-disaggregated data, specific GYW data studies can offer evidence-based insights to inform the development of gender-responsive policies and programmes. Additionally, available data on GYW should be used to ensure policymakers understand the specific needs and priorities of women and girls, which will lead to more effective and targeted interventions.
- Policymakers can support data stakeholders to advocate for dedicated data collection units within relevant ministries to focus on GYW-specific issues. In turn, data stakeholders can encourage policy stakeholders to prioritize data-driven decision making and utilization of data that promotes GYW participation, leadership and decision making.

Overall, decision makers and policymakers have an opportunity to strengthen evidence-based policy-making practices around GYW leadership, participation and decision making. This can help strategically align policies and resources to support GYW and GYW-focused and -led organizations, and foster a collaborative ecosystem that harnesses shared data insights to drive transformative change.

## The role and potential of GYW should be recognized

### Most relevant for: foundations, large international/regional/national organisations, decision and policymakers, GYW-focused and GYW-led organisations

Finally, and most importantly, it is important to recognize the role of GYW who sit at the heart of the issues explored in this research. But this is impossible without understanding the power struggles that GYW face at different levels. Often, the various barriers outlined in this report do not allow GYW to make independent decisions or to exercise leadership roles. However, they should be encouraged to seek spaces where they feel safe and empowered to explore, learn and exchange thinking on these topics. Mentoring and peer-to-peer learning support groups are examples of such spaces. Ultimately, GYW should define what leadership, participation and decision making means to them – and they should guide the rest of us.

## Conclusion

Despite a recognized need for data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making, data gaps persist. Currently, data collection primarily serves household statistics or programme outcomes, and it does not address elements of GYW leadership and participation that GYW themselves consider important. Existing conceptual and measurement frameworks often focus narrowly on political and governance aspects of leadership, and knowledge and understanding of these frameworks is limited among GYW and their organizations. These concepts should be expanded to encompass informal leadership settings, households and community participation.

Resource constraints and traditional data production methods result in data that do not reflect the lived experiences of GYW comprehensively. Moreover, data on GYW may be scattered across government agencies, NGOs and academic institutions, hindering access and consolidation for analysis. It is essential to rethink data collection approaches towards more intersectional, youth-led and community-driven methodologies to capture the nuanced experiences of GYW.

Finally, data collection must address the extent to which GYW are able and encouraged to meaningfully participate and take leadership roles in their families and communities, tackling key barriers along the way. This data can then inform discussions around issues affecting the lives of GYW, including health disparities and educational inequities, and enable data-driven advocacy and policymaking. Future research should consider non-political, community-focused leadership, personal decision making and the impact of social norms on leadership, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of GYW experiences.



## Annex 1: Research matrix

| Questions   | Audiences  | Methods  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>1. <b>What is the state of data on participation, leadership and decision making of GYW at household, community, schools, civil society and institutional levels in the nine She Leads countries?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can we classify the data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making?</li> <li>What legal frameworks around data collection exist in the nine She Leads countries and what is their role?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data providers, policy and other stakeholders</li> <li>Country Coordinators</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Desk-based research</li> </ul>                          |
| <p>2. <b>What conceptual and measurement frameworks exist to understand the participation, leadership and decision making of GYW and what do GYW feel is still needed/missing to measure the extent of GYW leadership and participation?</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data providers, policy and other stakeholders</li> <li>Country Coordinators and She Leads network</li> <li>GYW</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews and FGDs</li> <li>Survey</li> <li>Desk-based research</li> </ul> |
| <p>3. <b>What are the key barriers and enablers for collecting data on GYW participation, leadership and decision making?</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data providers, policy and other stakeholders</li> <li>Country Coordinators and She Leads network</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews &amp; FGDs</li> <li>Desk-based research</li> </ul>               |
| <p>4. <b>How do GYW and the organizations currently use data to advance youth leadership and political participation? How are the existing data gaps affecting their ability to do this?</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country Coordinators and She Leads network</li> <li>GYW</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews &amp; FGDs</li> <li>Survey</li> </ul>                            |

| Questions  | Audiences   | Methods   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>5. <b>How can GYW themselves contribute to a better understanding of data needs and leadership measurement indicators?</b></p>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country Coordinators and She Leads network</li> <li>GYW</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews &amp; FGDs</li> <li>Survey</li> </ul> |
| <p>6. <b>What kinds of outcomes could be achieved with improved access to high-quality data about GYW participation, leadership and decision making?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data providers and other stakeholders</li> <li>She Leads network</li> <li>GYW</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews &amp; FGDs</li> <li>Survey</li> </ul> |

## Annex 2: We are the stories we tell:

### My story – Bernice

#### My background

My name is Bernice Ocran Dodoo. I am 24 years of age and I am from Ghana. I am currently reading for my Masters degree in Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, where I also read for my bachelor's degree, completing it with first-class honours. Currently, I am the Ghana Representative for the She Leads Pan African Advisory Board on the She Leads project.

In Ghana, just like most African countries, I suffered inequalities growing up in all aspects of my life, especially since I had lots of goals and aspirations to be a career woman in life. Throughout my education and social life, I faced a lot of stereotypes. I was academically good at school and was ranked first in all of my school grades. I became conscious of the stereotype when I started hearing comments like "Why and how should a lady be leading the class all the time?" That was when I started being resistant. I was determined to be successful and nothing was going to stop me. The hardest part of it was my small body stature which made people think that I could not lead because leadership is all about charisma. It was a different story at home because the first three of us were girls and we had the opportunity to air our thoughts and feelings freely. People used to tell my mum that she has no future because we are all girls and there is no one to speak on her behalf in the community someday (a typical Ghanaian notion).

#### My experiences of being a leader as a young woman

When I decided to vie for the position of the General Secretary of the Graduate Students Association of Ghana in my school, I faced a lot of criticism because it

has been males over the years. I approached people, talked to them about it and I received some discouraging responses such as “You know this position is for men in this school because it entails too much to be occupied by a woman so why don’t you try something like the women’s commissioner”; “You are beautiful with a nice shape so try the Women’s Commissioner and people will vote for you”; “Stop trying to burden yourself with male positions in our school”. I never for once gave up: I gave them reasons to vote for me and I received pressure from my male opponents to step down so they can help me to win the position of the Women’s Commissioner. There were times when some men tried harassing me because I sought their votes. I carried on with my passion to sit around the table of decision making and also to lead. I won the election with a gap of 140 votes against the male opponent who came second. It gave me reasons to do more and encourage other girls to lead as well because it is possible. A young woman like me would have never had the opportunity to make decisions in my community but due to advocacy and projects that I am doing, it has helped define me as a responsible person who is contributing positively to society.

### The unanswered questions

Data on the involvement of GYW in leadership, participation and decision making are limited, but they are showing that gender is still an important factor when it comes to leadership – even at school levels. If enough relevant data on GYW leadership, active and meaningful participation and decision making would exist, it would help to facilitate and make clear the need to advocate for more GYW in leadership, participation and decision making. It would also give meaning to the advocacy for an increase in GYW in leadership, participation and decision-making.

Some of the most relevant and needed data could include: a) the percentage of GYW who are occupying leadership roles in active and meaningful community participation and in all levels of decision making; b) data on GYW living with disability who are actively leading, participating in and engaging in decision making; c) comparative analysis data on gaps between rural and urban GYW in leadership, participation and decision making; and d) data on achievements of GYW in leadership roles both in the formal and informal sectors and their effectiveness. If all of this data would be available, it would be useful for GYW-led organizations and would support our collective advocacy on GYW leadership, participation and decision making.

### Who can answer these questions?

My idea is that UN Women and gender-sensitive agencies such as UNICEF can conduct more and better research to help get more data on girls’ participation, leadership and decision making to facilitate advocacy on GYW leadership, participation and decision making. Such data would help better understand the existing data gaps and advocate for girls to participate, lead and take an active part in decision making, which will aid in achieving SDGs 5 and 17.

GYW-led organizations can also undertake such studies in their communities. I think this could work better because they have the opportunity to collect data on GYW, especially those in informal leadership, participation and decision making in the various communities to help us get enough data on the issue for collective and meaningful advocacy. Data can be collected on their own members (GYWs) on their leadership achievements, community participation and decision making. Local governments can also collect data on GYW. They are in the best position to collect accurate data in the various communities to stimulate government interest in GYW leadership and why it is necessary. This will lead to great recognition and value of the roles being played by GYW.

However, there are some barriers when it comes to engaging GYW with data collection. Collection of data involves financial resources which most of these girls do not have. There is also lack of recognition since most people do not take these GYW-led organizations as credible enough to handle their data. High rates of illiteracy (for example, in Ghana) also serves as a barrier to GYW collection of data. A lot of times, they have no idea how to collect and handle data or share findings to help advocate for more leadership, participation and decision making for GYW.

### Conclusion

To conclude, leadership does not rest on the shoulders of males. This is because I am doing so great with my current leadership at school despite the views that it is a male’s position, and I am helping my administration achieve great projects. I am actively involved in all the decision making which is yielding great results. Actively participating in the implementation of my female leadership clubs in some Senior High School in my District is also commendable. I believe GYW can do great in leadership, actively participate in their communities and engage in decision making. The existence of better data will help heighten our value and achievements in society. Better data will help us (GYWs) know and understand the gender gap, the dire consequences and how devastating the situation is if not addressed. It will give reasons as to why we need to fight for more GYW in leadership, participation and decision making.



## My story: Damaris Nyahondo

My name is Damaris Nyahondo. I am 22 years old and I am from Nairobi, Kenya, where I live in the slum of Mathare with my mom and grandmother. I am passionate about community development and advocacy and, most importantly, being a changemaker in my community. I train my other peers on sexual and reproductive health and rights, social accountability, and good governance. The reason why I love advocacy is that most of our elected duty-bearers are not that accountable – that's why I decided to learn about accountability so that most young people can be aware of the right procedures instead of rioting and so leaders can start performing.

My own leadership journey

When I started my leadership journey, it wasn't that easy, since my community members were still focused on male-dominated leadership. This made them question or not give opportunities to ladies because they feel ladies cannot lead properly. That's why last year I applied to be the youth ward representative, which has always been known as a position for men to participate in and get elected. I was competing with two young men, making me the only lady to vie for that position in my community. The one thing that made me apply was the issue of women's participation in leadership and decision making platforms and also the issue of contraceptives, since there was a rise in the number of teenage pregnancies and HIV cases among girls between the ages 15–24 years which was a result of not enough contraceptives, plus the community also did not have an idea if there are any policies for solving this issue.

Some of the challenges that I face are that most of my community members are still much into social norms. This makes them question whether to give girls the opportunity to take part in a leadership position because in their perspectives they are still into male-dominated leadership and still on cultures that state men should always be the ones leading, be it in family set-ups and also the community in general. The other challenge is that most duty-bearers feel like we are targeting them and making the public start questioning their actions. Once you start advocating for accountability they see you as a threat and even some are not willing to participate in this forum when we invite them. This is why through the leadership training I had undergone I decided it was time for me to look for opportunities that could help me start participating in community leadership and public forums.

In my opinion, more advocacy should be done so that my community perspective can change and women as much as men would be allowed to participate in leadership positions and be changemakers of their community. There is also the need for YGW in my community to start participating in leadership positions.

### What data around GYW leadership is available in Kenya?

In my community, there has not been any data collected before on girls' and women's participation in leadership because most girls are reluctant when it comes to leadership. There are some examples of research in Kenya, for example in 2019 a research study was done on women's leadership and governance which focused on creating an advocacy and action-based plan to implement the use of data through the means of grassroots advocates. The research is summarized in the following excerpts.

**"In 2019 we focused on reducing gaps between policymakers and advocates to promote data culture and anticipated a change in social behaviour and attitude in the discussion of gender empowerment and inequalities. We also reached out to up to 156 representatives of local, national, international civil society organizations and members of the press whom we trained to understand the impact of Data, most importantly the community-generated data and the EM2030 data tool and at the end of the year all the advocates trained were able to clearly articulate the Gender Indicators and to make the Gender Hub more accessible, easy to read we developed info-graphics for awareness raising."**

**GROOTS Kenya, 2019**

Beyond examples such as this, wider data are missing: for example, data are not disaggregated according to SDG indicator requirements (e.g., by sex, region (rural/urban), persons with disability, etc.); there is also a lack of qualitative data on gender, which are necessary for an understanding of women's capabilities and participation in all spheres of life (economic, social and political).

### What could be done to improve the data available?

Having such data available, organizations would be able to involve girls and women at the grassroots level so that they can start taking part in advocacy and governance, and in the county budgeting process. They could also hold the duty bearers to account. Based on my research around this subject, I believe there are several areas that could be addressed in order to improve the data available around GYW leadership, participation and decision making:

- More GYW could be trained on various data collecting tools to start meaningful participation and also so that they can understand the need for and importance of making advocacy evidence-based. This will mean that each time they want or are demanding something from the community or duty bearers they are sure of what they are saying plus they also have evidence showing their complaints and wants.
- Various processes and ways of communicating with users should be strengthened and enhanced, including improving data visualization and access to data.
- The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) and the State Department of Gender Affairs (SDGA) should collaborate with the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) to start a repository of research and qualitative data (e.g., databases, data portals, open access study reports, journal papers, and blogs).
- More consultations with data users should be held, given that both of them benefit data producers and users. This will also go a long way towards improving perceptions of transparency and collaboration, which are the foundations for building trust.

- Capacity-building programmes to strengthen data literacy among GYW should be developed, beginning with professional statisticians, data scientists and data managers. It is clear that the need for training, manuals on concepts, indicators and methods in gender analysis, and for workshops to raise awareness and share experiences are still few and must be emphasized. Common technical platforms and data standards should be agreed upon, to ensure the rapid and comprehensive dissemination of data, indicators and other statistics. Therefore, there is a need to develop manuals or guidelines on the generation, collation and analysis of gender statistics, including data visualization.

My thoughts are if we want to end data gaps among GYW we need to start doing more advocacies and sensitization so that girls and women can be educated on the importance of keeping data and the right ways of analysing the data so that we can be able to see the change that we want in our communities. Data are key to every community mostly when we want to have the figures of girls and women participating in leadership but also in solving some of the challenges that the community faces in general. The need for having data is very important since young girls and women can now be capable of involving the relevant county government authorities in charge of handling data for the purpose of strengthening policies and making sure that their implementation is smooth.

### Annex 3: Research intern job description

**She Leads** is a consortium that brings together child rights organisations, feminist/ women's rights organisations, and girl- and young women- (GYW) groups to support and equip girls and young women to drive change in their countries. This year, together with **Equal Measures 2030** and **The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC)**, She Leads are working together to understand the data available on the leadership of girls and young women and how can we strengthen their participation.

**As part of this research, we are looking for 2 research interns to join us remotely.**

#### What will your role look like?

Overall, you will help us make sure that our research reflects girls' and young women's voices and experiences. We will make sure that the internship is aligned with your interests and skills, but some of the things you might be involved in will be:

- Participating in workshops and sharing your opinions
- Helping us review/design data collection tools (for example, our surveys)
- Conducting research on girls' and young women's participation and leadership
- Helping us share the findings with other girls' and young women

To support you in the role, you will also have a short introductory training and regular check-ins throughout your internship.

**Compensation:** You will receive a stipend of \$1,000, with additional expenses (for data, device) covered if needed.

**Timeframe:** We ask for a commitment of 20 hours of work over January-February

2023 (preferably 4 hours weekly over a 5-week period, however, this is flexible and can be discussed). The internship can be managed alongside other work, study or caring responsibilities.

#### What do we expect from you?

- Be based in one of the 9 She Leads countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Uganda)
- Be able to work in Arabic, English or French
- Be 18-25 years old
- Have some basic computer skills

#### You might particularly enjoy this internship if you:

- Have a passion for GYW leadership and participation
- Are interested in research, advocacy and learning
- Feel comfortable working independently when needed
- Are happy to share your ideas and challenge those around you, including us!
- Sounds interesting?

To apply, please send us a short email at [gabriele@tsiconsultancy.com](mailto:gabriele@tsiconsultancy.com) which should include:

- A short introduction about yourself (your age, country, your current involvement with the She Leads programme, and anything else you want to share with us about yourself)
- One to three reasons why you are interested in this internship
- A short answer to the question 'If you could do one thing to improve girls' and young women's participation and leadership, what would you do and why?'

We also accept audio and video applications which should cover the answers to the above.

The applications will be open until 31 December 2022. If you have any follow up questions or concerns, or want an informal chat about the internship, please email us using the address above.

### Annex 4: Relevant conceptual frameworks

To help systemize existing frameworks, we have categorized them into: a) Development; b) Participation; and c) Gender.

#### Development

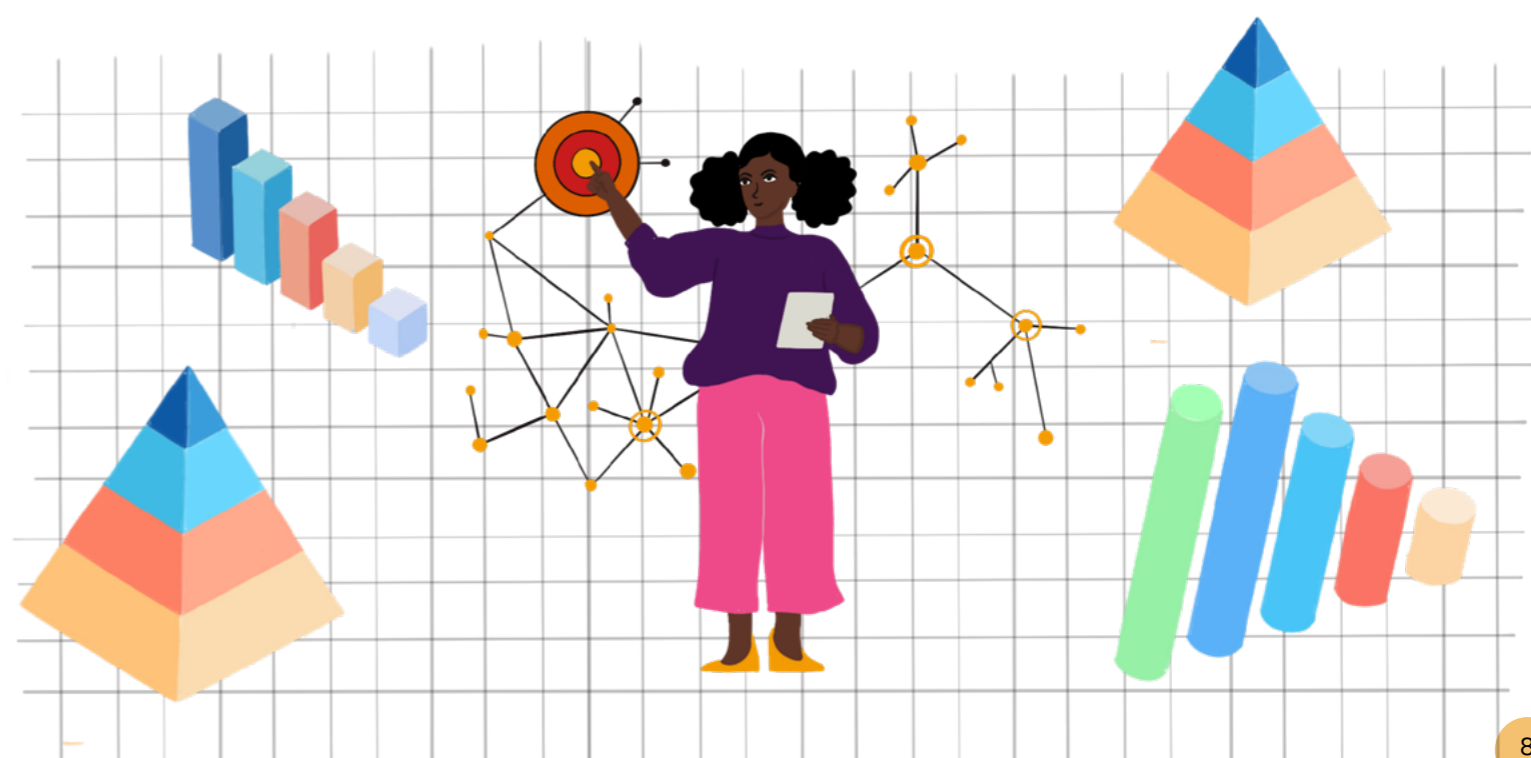
##### SDG framework

The sustainable development framework provides a comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding gender data gaps and addressing gender disparities. The framework that is commonly referenced in this context is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the SDGs adopted by UN member states

in 2015.<sup>36</sup> Specific and measurable indicators are in place to evaluate progress made towards these goals. SDG 5 explicitly focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. GYW leadership is a crucial aspect of gender equality, and monitoring and analysis of GYW representation in leadership roles can provide insights into progress towards this SDG.

| SDG   | Gender-specific indicators <sup>37</sup>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.1 Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural)</li> <li>1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age</li> <li>1.2.2 Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions</li> <li>1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable</li> <li>1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure</li> </ul> |
| <b>Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.2.3 Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, by pregnancy status (percentage)</li> <li>2.3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio</li> <li>3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel</li> <li>3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations</li> <li>3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods</li> <li>3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group</li> <li>3.8.1 Coverage of essential health services</li> </ul>  |

| SDG   | Gender-specific indicators <sup>37</sup>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex</li> <li>4.2.1 Proportion of children aged 24–59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex</li> <li>4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex</li> <li>4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex</li> <li>4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated</li> <li>4.6.1 Proportion of the population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex</li> <li>4.7.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment</li> <li>4.a.1 Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service</li> </ul> |



| SDG  | Gender-specific indicators <sup>37</sup>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex</li> <li>5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age</li> <li>5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence</li> <li>5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18</li> <li>5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age</li> <li>5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location</li> <li>5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments</li> <li>5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions</li> <li>5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care</li> <li>5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education</li> <li>5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure</li> <li>5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control</li> <li>5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex</li> <li>5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment</li> </ul> |

| SDG   | Gender-specific indicators <sup>37</sup>  |
|---|---|
| <b>Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex</li> <li>8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities</li> <li>8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</li> <li>8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age</li> <li>8.8.1 Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status</li> <li>8.8.2 Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status</li> </ul> |
| <b>Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0.2.1 Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</li> <li>11.7.1 Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</li> <li>11.7.2 Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13.3.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment</li> </ul>  |

| SDG  | Gender-specific indicators <sup>37</sup>  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age</li> <li>16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause</li> <li>16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation</li> <li>16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18</li> <li>16.7.1 Proportions of positions in national and local public institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups</li> <li>16.7.2 Proportion of the population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group</li> </ul> |

Table 9. Gender-specific SDG indicators

## Strengthening Gender Statistics (SGS)

In order to understand the data gaps around GYW leadership, participation and decision making, it is important to recognize the work that is being done around addressing gender data gaps more generally. The SGS project of the World Bank uses a demand-driven model to improve the availability, quality and use of gender-disaggregated data worldwide.<sup>38</sup> The aim is to contribute to more informed and evidence-based policymaking. It has been instrumental in identifying gender data gaps where: 1) data are not collected at all; 2) data may not be complete or appropriate; 3) complete data are collected, but there may be limited disaggregation or methods of analysis; and 4) these conditions are fulfilled, but the data are not disseminated.

This demand-driven framework speaks to the issue of data gaps on GYW participation, leadership and decision making and thus it can help improve evidence on gender-based challenges and identify data entry points. However, it does not provide a conceptual understanding of participation, leadership and decision making of GYW.

<sup>38</sup>World Bank, "Strengthening Gender Statistics".

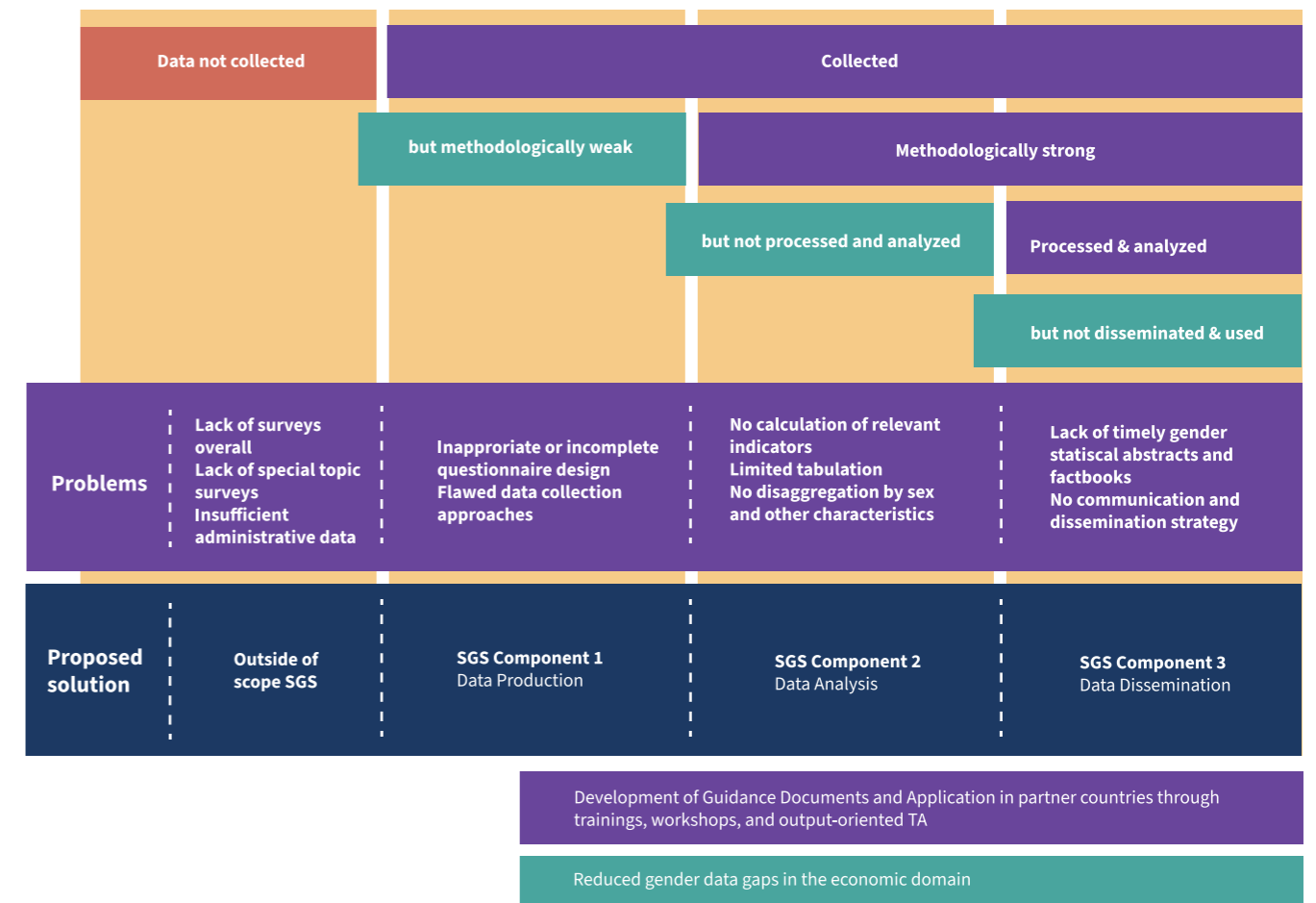


Figure 9. SGS Entry points for addressing gender data gaps<sup>39</sup>

## Participation

### Trócaire's concept of space

Trócaire's lens or framework focusing on spaces can be used to analyse the concept of participation.<sup>40</sup> The idea is to make use of space as a tool, since space is integral to generating new opportunities for citizens and transforming existing systems to give them voice and agency over community decisions. This focus on space draws on Andrea Cornwall's (2002, 2004, 2007) work on spaces, which views "participation as a spatial practice within bounded yet permeable arenas".<sup>41</sup> This framework of space permits understanding of the role of power, voice and agency, since space is not apolitical and therefore it cannot be analysed without understanding the inherent power dynamics at play. Cornwall argues that spaces must act as sites of power to enable women to participate, challenge dominant gender norms and address barriers to their voice and agency.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Newbury and Wallace, *The Space Between*.

<sup>41</sup>Cornwall's work is cited in *ibid.*, 8.

To understand the power dynamics within these spaces, it is important to consider:

- Who created the space and the rules governing entry
- Who accesses the space, how well prepared they are and the barriers to access
- The purpose and nature of the space
- Who participates in the space and how well they can perform, given the rules (are these empowering and enabling or limiting and obstructive?)
- What enables success.

### Roger Hart's ladder of youth participation

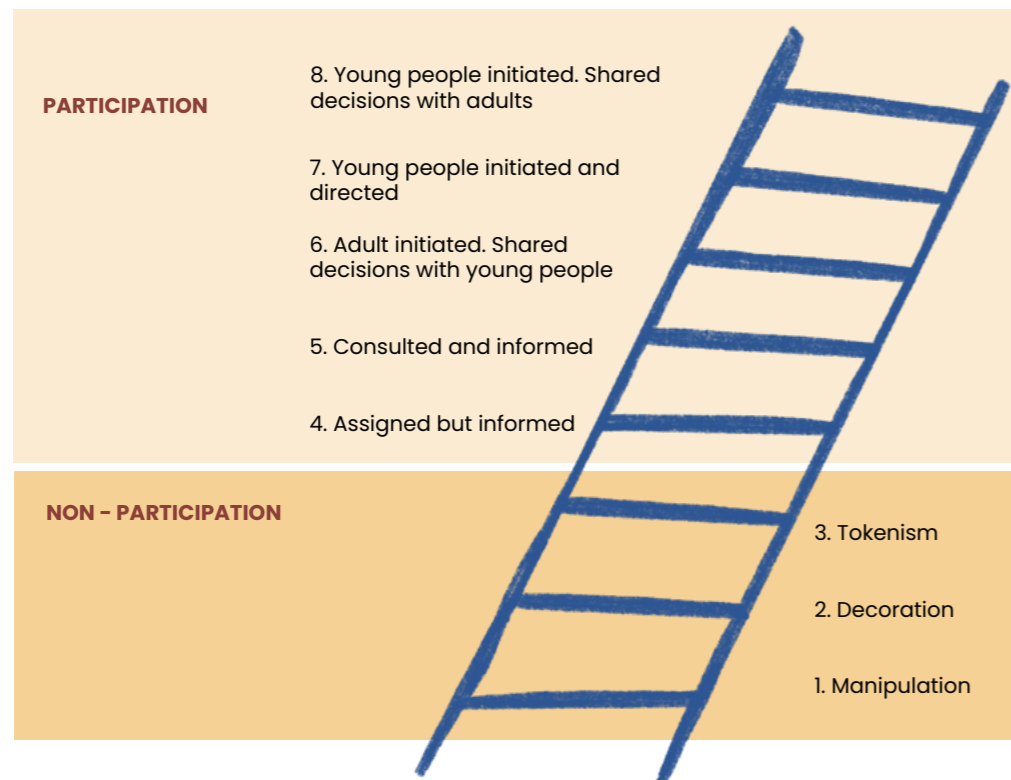


Figure 10. Ladder of youth participation<sup>42</sup>

Roger Hart's ladder of children's or youth participation focuses on the need to bring in the perspectives of young individuals in aspiring democracy. It recognizes that the first three steps of the ladder are mostly non-participatory (i.e., manipulation, decoration and tokenism) where young people have little or no influence, and the remaining five steps are participatory. Unpacking this tool can allow an understanding of the levels of meaningful participation of youth during the various phases of research and evaluation.

<sup>42</sup> MeFirst, "Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation", Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, n.d., <https://www.mefirst.org.uk/resource/arnsteins-ladder-of-participation/#:~:text=Roger%20Hart%E2%80%99s%20ladder%20of%20children%E2%80%99s%20participation%20is%20adapted,zones%20he%20calls%20%E2%80%98Non-Participation%E2%80%99%20and%20%E2%80%98Degrees%20of%20Participation%E2%80%99.>

<sup>43</sup>Hart, "Children's Participation".

### Capability and functioning approach

Another useful framework is the Capability model of development introduced by Amartya Sen, which highlights interpersonal differences in achieving capabilities. For Sen, many capabilities have underlying requirements that vary strongly with social circumstances.

The Capabilities Approach has the advantage of being focused on what people can do, as well as what they cannot do. This means we can see both where people have agency, and what needs to change in order for more capabilities to be functioning. This avoids a deficit account of vulnerability: where we assume that people with particular social characteristics (e.g., single parents) must be vulnerable. It also brings to the fore the contextual factors that shape people's access to capabilities, which can be a starting point for defining context-specific vulnerabilities or barriers. This is why Sen's Capability Approach declares that the basic capabilities or the minimum standard should be set by each culture itself. This approach is useful as it focuses not only on the lives of individuals, but it also integrates normative considerations which influence an individual's agency to participate – which itself has an impact on both context and capabilities. Thus, as a conceptual framework, the Capabilities Approach can help frame rights as capabilities which can allow us to see that, in many contexts, women do not have the capabilities to function as equals.

### CHOICE's Flower of Participation model

The Flower of Participation model, often associated with the organization CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, is a conceptual framework that describes different levels of participation and engagement in decision-making processes. This model can be applied to understand and analyse youth-related issues by considering various dimensions of participation and agency related to gender equality and empowerment:

#### Non-participation (outer petals)

**Tokenism:** In many contexts, this could refer to a symbolic representation of young individuals or marginalized genders without meaningful engagement or decision-making power. For instance, having young people in advisory roles without their opinions being genuinely considered.

#### Manipulation (second petal)

**Controlled participation:** This might involve situations where youth-related policies or decisions are made, but the process is controlled by a dominant group, often sidelining the voices and concerns of marginalized genders.

### Decoration (third petal)

Consultation and informing: In youth-centred issues, this could represent instances where input from young people is sought but it is not necessarily integrated into the decision-making process. It might be seen as 'checking a box' to show inclusivity.

### Tokenism (fourth petal)

Participation by assigned roles: This could refer to involving young people in specific roles or activities, without giving them genuine decision-making power. For example, assigning certain tasks to them without involving them in the overall planning or decision making.

### Assigned power (centre)

Partnership and ownership: This level involves genuine partnership and shared decision making where young individuals are empowered as true partners in policy development, programme planning and decision making.

Understanding youth-related issues using this model allows for an analysis of the depth and quality of participation and engagement of young people in various aspects of society. It helps identify areas where genuine empowerment can be achieved by moving towards the centre of the flower, where meaningful participation and partnership are prioritized. This can inform strategies and actions to ensure that gender-related policies and initiatives are more inclusive, equitable and effective. However, the model has limitations. First, it does not explicitly highlight gender-specific barriers that affect participation and data representation because meaningful youth participation means addressing the gender disparities that often stem from social, cultural, economic and institutional factors. Secondly, the model presents participation levels in a static manner, implying fixed stages of participation. In reality, participation is dynamic and can change over time based on various factors, including changing societal norms, policies and opportunities.

## UNICEF's Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation

UNICEF advocates for meaningful youth participation, where young people are actively engaged, and respected, and where their contributions are valued in all stages of decision making, from planning to evaluation. Their involvement should not be tokenistic but genuinely impactful. UNICEF's Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation recognizes multiple features and modes of youth participation. To make participation adolescent-friendly, it highlights four essential features: spaces, voice, influence and audience. It also indicates that ensuring meaningful participation for adolescents through the provision of spaces means addressing gender-based norms.

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework*.

By categorizing their participation in four modes, the framework allows for understanding of the types and features of youth participation. This can be considered a spectrum of participation ranging from non-participation to consultative participation before being collaborative and finally adolescent-led. Thus, the framework can be useful for measuring the impact of efforts to increase youth leadership and participation. Although it does not talk explicitly about data, the framework's emphasis on meaningful youth participation can facilitate conceptualization and implementation for youth-focused programme-level data collection.

## Gender

### Agency-based indicators to measure gender empowerment

There are multiple definitions and theories of empowerment. The cumulative understanding of these theories has been useful in the design of a conceptual framework by the Centre on Gender Health and Equity.<sup>50</sup>

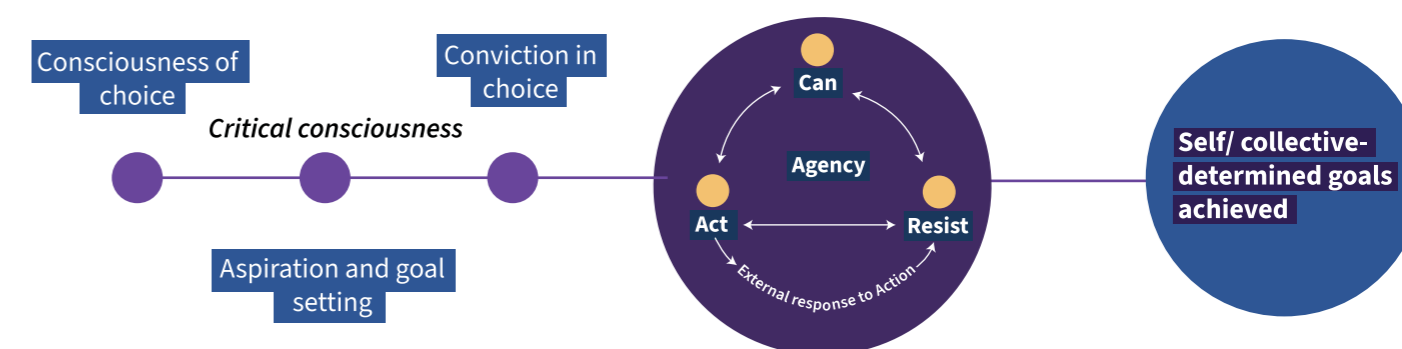


Figure 11. The empowerment process for individuals and collectives<sup>51</sup>

The model (see Figure 11) centres on the concept of critical consciousness, which is followed by experiencing/exercising agency. Although the framework appears to be linear, in fact, it recognizes that agency is a complex process, which might be subject to resistance from external forces and may fall back to the previous stage of critical consciousness.

Alongside this model, GEWE indicators developed by Goulart et al.<sup>52</sup> can be used to assess empowerment and equality across multiple domains (see Table 10).

<sup>50</sup>Anita Raj, Arnab K. Dey, Rebecka Lundgren and EMERGE, *A Conceptual Framework for Measuring Women's Empowerment* (San Diego, CA: Center on Gender Health and Equity (GEH), University of California San Diego, April 2021) <https://emerge.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/emerge-conceptual-framework-to-measure-empowerment.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>52</sup>Goulart et al., "Tools for Measuring".

| Domains                     | Indicators for measurement  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Economic domain</b>      | <i>Employment, financial decision making and income generation.</i>   |
| <b>Health domain</b>        | Bodily autonomy, health perceptions and access to services.   |
| <b>Human development</b>    | Access to basic needs, education and vocational training. Indicators that measure a change/effect in women's empowerment resulting from an intervention are also categorized under human development. |
| <b>Leadership</b>           | Leadership qualities and community participation.   |
| <b>Psychological</b>        | Women's self-esteem and social support.   |
| <b>Security and justice</b> | Laws/policies that affect women, as well as their sense of safety and security in their respective communities.   |
| <b>Socio-cultural</b>       | GBV, as well as the cultural norms and attitudes relating to women's autonomy.  |

Table 10. GEWE indicators

## Frameworks addressing Gender data gaps

To address data gaps during the Covid-19 pandemic, a comprehensive framework was proposed by several organizations.<sup>53</sup> The framework (see Figure 12) emphasizes intersectionality to understand and value diversity, the collection of sex-disaggregated data, and the importance of including non-traditional gender data (from diverse sources such as the private sector).



Figure 12. Framework for strengthening gender measures and data

<sup>53</sup>Center on Gender Equity and Health, Data2X, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, et al., Strengthening Gender Measures and Data in the COVID-19 Era: An Urgent Need for Change (Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, n.d.) [https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/COVID-19\\_Gender\\_Data\\_and\\_Measures\\_Evidence\\_Review.pdf](https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/COVID-19_Gender_Data_and_Measures_Evidence_Review.pdf).



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